

A^N ARMY MULE



Charles
Miner
Thompson

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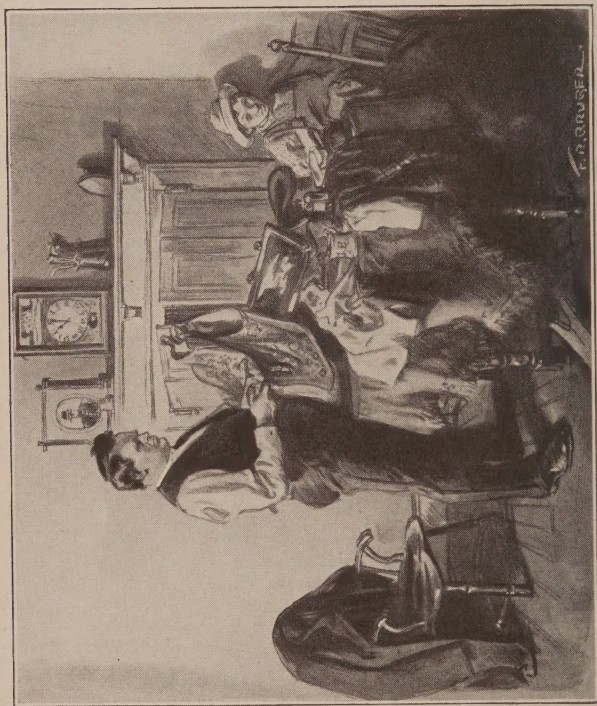
By Charles Miner Thompson

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AN ARMY MULE



FELLER'D OUGHT TO SPRUCE UP SOME TO HIS OWN WEDDIN' (page 2)

AN ARMY MULE

BY

CHARLES MINER THOMPSON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

F. R. GRUGER



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GRATEFULLY

TO

H. N. T.

NOTE

This simple chronicle of Job, the patient man, first appeared in *The Youth's Companion*: its publishers I thank for many courtesies. I thank also Mr. Ira Rich Kent for much helpful suggestion and criticism, and Mr. Francis W. Hight for the design of the alluring cover.

THE AUTHOR.

ILLUSTRATIONS

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I

THE day had come on which Mr. Job Bixby thought that he was going to be married.

The year was 1874, the month was June, the place was Job's little farmhouse. Job was in the kitchen, through the open windows of which came a soft and perfumed breeze. He was as yet without coat, collar, or cravat, but his shirt was white and his waistcoat and trousers were those of his best black Sunday suit. On the kitchen table sprawled his cavernous old carpet-bag, in a litter of articles that were yet to go into it. His old white horse, harnessed to the Concord wagon, stood waiting by

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the back stoop to take him to Ellmington, two miles away. The wedding was to be at noon, and by the painted clock on the kitchen mantel it was already a quarter to eleven.

Rufe Holt, Job's orphan chore-boy, his wide-brimmed straw hat pushed far back on his head, his brown, bare toes curled round the rungs of the chair in which he was sitting, and his hands thrust behind the bib of his old blue overalls, looked on with dejected eyes. Rufe was sure that Job would now give up the farm, and go to live in the village, and that, consequently, he would have no longer any use for a chore-boy.

"A feller 'd ought to spruce up some to his own weddin'," Job was saying in his big, booming voice, as he held up before the sad-eyed Rufe a flowered silk waistcoat of antiquated cut. "That was made

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out'n Grandmother Bixby's weddin' gown. Father, he put it on to his weddin', an' I 'm goin' to put it on to mine." And his mouth shut on the sentence like a trap.

"Rufe," he continued, as he turned the waistcoat this way and that, the better to admire its floral beauties, "the fence down to the medder needs fixin'. Kinder see to 't, will ye, while I 'm gone?"

"Uh-huh," said Rufe.

"What's the matter with ye, anyhow?" asked Job, struck with the dullness of the boy's tone. "Ye act glum as a sick rooster. I guess ye know I 'd like ye at the weddin'; but some one's got to stay home and look to things. Ain't frettin' 'bout that, be ye?"

Rufe's eyes fell and he returned no answer. Job gazed at him a moment, then turned again to the waistcoat.

"I s'pose I might put it on now,

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'stead of the black one. But I guess I won't — not till I get to Hannah's. It's kinder dusty, and then some feller might get sassy 'bout it 'long the road. I don't wanter hafter stop and tune no smart Aleck." And through the thick screen of his bushy eyebrows, his blue eyes twinkled at the unresponsive Rufe. "I'll just put it into the bag till the proper time *and* season. When I do get it on, I'll look 'bout's well as the rest on 'em, now I tell ye."

He cast a complacent eye at the old-fashioned beaver hat standing on the dresser, and then down over his black suit to his thick boots. "Ye tallered them boots up fine, Rufe," he added.

He crossed the room to the little square looking-glass which was hung directly opposite the kitchen stove: an artful arrangement of his bachelor house-

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keeping by which he could shave and watch his cooking at the same moment. At the glass, he put on his black satin stock, and drew the comb through the great shock of thick hair that flared up above his smooth-shaven, sun-burned, pugnacious face.

"I don't aim to be gone more 'n three-four days," he went on. "You take good care of the critters. You better get some old duds and fix up a scarecrow. 'T will kinder help ye pass the time."

"What old duds?" asked Rufe.

"Wall, I dunno," answered Job. "S'pose ye skirmish round some and lemme see what ye find. I don't want ye usin' anything extr'y."

"Thought you was goin' to leave the farm when you got married," said Rufe.

"What put that idea inter yer head?" cried Job, running his hand through his

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hair and glaring at the boy. "Me and Hannah's goin' to set right down here. This farm's my farm; 't was my father's farm, and his father's,—the one that came up from down Connecticut way,—and I aim to live and die on't,—summer times, anyway," he added lamely. "Mebbe Hannah might get to feel some lonesome, come winter. You get that scarecrow fixed. That corn wa'n't planted for crows, that's sartain."

Rufe started on his errand, and Job, having slipped on his coat, which, with its high rolling collar and over long skirts, sat clumsily on his short, sturdy figure, stood a moment and eyed his carpet-bag.

"Them bonds better go in next," he decided.

Job's bedroom opened out of the kitchen. Close beside the big, billowy feather-

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bed stood an old-fashioned "key-and-plug" safe. The original plug had been lost, and now Job drew from his pocket the substitute which he had roughly whittled from an old broom-handle. A leather thong passing through an eye-hole in the butt attached it to the large but simple key.

Job knelt and pushed the plug into its aperture; then, inserting and turning the key, he swung open the door. From the depths of the safe he took some thick, folded papers covered with green engraving. With these in his hand, he returned to the kitchen.

At the same moment, Rufe entered from the woodshed with an old straw hat which he had found in the barn, an old coat which had long hung in the shed and had faded to a greenish yellow, and some ragged overalls which a Domi-

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nique hen had been using to nest in, time out of mind. He tossed them on the table for Job to look at.

"Them ain't much use," he said.

"Mabbe, mabbe," answered Job in a preoccupied way. "Now, here's them Hannibal and St. Jo Railroad eight per cent coupon bonds wuth ten thousand dollars. Always been safe right here to home. Father, he always kept his valuables in that safe, an' I always did — hain't anythin' been took yet. I ain't afeard of any burglars. Guess they'd think twice 'fore they'd fool round *much* with a feller that helped hold back Early to Cedar Creek, and has got his gun yet, by cricky. Guess ye've heard folks say I was sot, hain't ye, Rufe? Wall, I guess 't was lucky a few on us *was* sot — 'long 'bout then. I guess any burglar that come along would find I was tol'able spry for

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a feller that was all shot to pieces to the war." Job stopped to chuckle. "But Hannah," he continued, "she's all in a tew to have the bonds kept in the bank. I 'lowed they'd be almost as safe to the bank as they would be to home—a feller's got to humor his wife *some*—just at first, 't any rate. Peaslee said I might leave 'em to the bank just as well's not."

As he talked, Job, not finding anything on the table to suit his purpose, fished a shirt or so and his waistcoat out of the carpet-bag and carefully rolled up the bonds in them in a tight bundle.

"Don't seem's though them sheets of paper could be worth that much," said Rufe, startled from his apathy by the sight of so much wealth.

"Wall, they be," said Job, and glanced at the clock. "Wall, now," he exclaimed, "it's gittin' mighty nigh time to start."

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Then an expression of dismay overspread his face. "Jehoshaphat, King of Judee!" he boomed. "If I ain't gone and clean forgot to feed that calf! Wall, they can't marry me till I get there, that's sartain."

"I can feed her," said Rufe.

"No, ye can't, either," retorted Job. "I'm goin' to see to that calf myself."

"I've got to feed her to-morrow," ventured Rufe.

"To-morrow ain't to-day," said Job, succinctly. "I've always fed that calf, and there ain't any one else goin' to feed her long's I'm round. Just stuff them socks and things into the bag, will ye?"

Job got a pail of milk and started for the barn. The old hound, that had been watching them from under the sink, crawled forth and went scratching across

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the bare floor after him. He was a lean, bony animal to whom large, mournful eyes, heavy, down-dropping ears, and hanging dewlaps gave a most mournful look. The Congregational minister, chancing to ask the dog's name, had looked somewhat dubious when told that it was Calvin.

"Named him after old Cal. Hunt that used t' own him," said Job, vaguely wondering at the minister's expression.

Job and Calvin walked across the kitchen yard in the bright sunshine, and along the driveway to the barn. Setting his pail of milk down in the middle of the empty bay, Job led the calf from the stall in which it was shut, while Calvin, seating himself on his haunches in the doorway, regarded him with an air of heartfelt commiseration.

"Ye don't look as if ye approved much

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of marryin' or givin' in marriage," said Job, and laughed.

He thought exultantly of Hannah Foster, his betrothed. "She's got faculty — lots on 't — and she's just as easy as an old shoe. 'T ain't often ye find 'em that way." He thought of the ceremony. "I guess there'll be a sight of folks turn out: Hannah's well liked to the village." He thought of the Ellmington brass band, of which he was a member. "Guess the boys are plannin' to play somethin' — No. 13, now — that's a real foot-lifter, that march is." He thought of the future. "I tell ye it's goin' to be slick — out to the farm summers, in to the village when snow flies. Hannah's a real good cook, too; what she cooks's got some taste to 't." He whistled a bar of No. 13, with gusto. "Say," he said, "I most wish 't I had my old horn." The

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deep notes of his "after-beat" part rose and fell pleasantly in his memory, — *oom, ta ta — oom, ta ta — oom, ta ta*. He gave the red and white calf a resounding slap, and exclaimed, "I tell ye, ye're some of a calf!"

And into that hearty sentence entered his whole sense of the beauty of the sweet June day, his satisfaction in his coming wedding, his confidence in a happy — and well-fed — future.

"Calvin, you old croaker, get out!" And he kicked playfully at the hound.

The calf was being weaned. Job led it to the pail, and pushing back the sleeve of his black coat, thrust one hand into the milk, wiggled his fingers, and made enticing sucking sounds with his lips. "Drink, bossy, so-o-o bossy, drink," he coaxed.

But now that the milk was under her

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nose, the calf would not drink: she pretended to take great interest in things outside the barn; she even snorted a little, and pulled back, as if in sudden fright. Job, taking her by the back of the neck, held her nose firmly to the pail. "Kind o' playful this mornin', be ye?" he said indulgently.

But the calf did not like being held. Her eyes rolled with anxiety and she pressed up strongly against Job's restraining hand.

"I got ye," he said with kindly firmness. "Ye might 's well make up your mind to 't."

Then suddenly the calf wrenched her head away and escaped. She danced about the bay, her absurd tail held high. Job, keeping between her and the open door, tried to corner her. She would wait until his hand was almost upon her

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halter; then snort, and with a flirt of her hind legs, bolt sidewise.

When Job finally caught her, he was beginning to worry lest he should not reach Ellmington in time. Holding on to the calf, he managed to pull out his old spherical silver watch—it was twenty-three minutes past eleven. “You got to drink this time,” he said with heat.

Straddling the calf, he pressed her head into the pail with one hand while he again waggled the fingers of the other under the milk, and again made alluring sucking sounds. But the calf would not drink.

“You obstinate critter, drink; will ye! Drink, I tell ye! I can’t wait all day for ye.”

Rufe now appeared from the farmhouse. He had finished packing Job’s

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bag, and had come to see what was keeping his employer so long.

"I guess I could coax her," he said. "Let me try, won't ye?"

"No, I won't ye," and Job gave the calf's head a vicious push. That was a mistake; for the little beast's nose went into the milk over her nostrils. Suddenly finding her breath cut off, her nose full of milk, and herself in imminent danger of suffocation, she wrenched her head violently out of the pail. And then, naturally, she snorted.

The milk thus forcibly dispersed nearly blinded Job, and made his black suit look as if it had been out in a rain of whitewash.

Keeping fast hold of the halter, he lifted his face, purple with rage, and ran his hand through his hair, till it rose like an angry mane. Rufe was trying not to

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laugh, and Calvin looked at his master as if deprecating such an outburst of the natural, unregenerate man. The sight of them increased Job's anger: he said nothing, but with tight-shut, obstinate mouth, and blazing blue eyes, he straddled the calf again and put her nose—not gently—back into the milk.

“Let me do it, Mr. Bixby,” said Rufe, when he had obtained self-control enough to speak. “You’ve got to clean up. You’ll be late to the weddin’—sure as shootin’.”

“No!” thundered Job, his pent-up wrath breaking forth. “No! I’ll make this calf drink if I don’t marry Hannah till next year!”

Rufe looked a bit frightened, and Calvin slunk away as if shocked to the very centre of his moral sense.

When Rufe joined his master at the

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barn, he of course left unguarded the Hannibal and St. Jo Railroad eight per cent coupon bonds, worth ten thousand dollars. This would not have mattered had it not been for two boys, Willard Marvin, son of Esek Marvin, Job's nearest neighbor, and Bert Taylor, a city boy, who were tramping over the hill high above Job's farmhouse, and who could see the whole of Job's little domain spread out like a map beneath them.

Almost under their feet rose the green dome of Job's sugar grove; then came, in order, his apple orchard; his little red house with the lilac bushes by the kitchen ell, and its four stiff maples in the unkempt, terraced, front yard; the yellow dusty "Branch road" leading to Ellmington; the gaunt, gray barn facing the house; and then, winding through the meadow where bobolinks flew and sang,

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the Branch itself—a bright, gleaming, silvery ribbon flung at the foot of the further hills. They were looking down upon it all, when Job and Calvin went across the kitchen yard to the barn.

“Hi,” said Willard, “there’s old Bixby. Just look at the old skeezicks. Got his Sunday clothes on!” And Willard chuckled.

“Who’s old Bixby?” asked Bert.

“Hain’t you ever heard of old Bixby! Well, you don’t know much,” exclaimed Willard, in a tone that made Bert feel as if he had betrayed ignorance of George Washington. “He’s the contrariest old feller you eversaw! Father says he’d ram a stone wall till his head bust ’fore he’d give up he could n’t knock it over. And cranky! Got into a row once down to Ellmington over a bill. Told the feller he’d pay him the exact price and not

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one stiver more. The bill was fourteen dollars and sixty-five and a half cents. Well, Job was so mad, he went into Farley's and bought a hatchet and a hammer and cut a cent in two, so that the feller shouldn't get any more than the law said he'd got to pay him. Hatchet and hammer cost him a dollar 'n a half. Guess he didn't save *much* !

“ Say, he 's in the band — plays an old horn that looks like a brass doughnut. And you'd just ought to see him Decoration Day — swelled up just like an old turkey-cock, and he limps and carries a cane. Says he was ‘ all shot to pieces to the war. ’ Huh, *him* ! Hear him talk you'd think he fit the whole war to himself. And say, he 's goin' to be married to-day. That's why he's all dressed up when 't ain't Sunday, I guess. Let's go down and watch him, — what d' ye say?

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Wish 't I could play some trick on him!"

Willard's father had once been worsted by the stubborn soldier in a dispute over a boundary fence, and his view of Job had been unfavorable ever since. Willard, a natural partisan, had easily come to feel that Job was legitimate game. As the two boys raced down the hill, and through the sugar orchard, Willard so talked of Job that Bert inferred that the farmer was the dire enemy of all boy kind.

When they reached the edge of the grove, Willard slowed his pace and went cautiously. "Now," he said, "you follow me. We're Injuns. That's the cabin of the paleface. I'm Chief. Don't you let a twig crack under your foot, or I'll tomahawk you quicker 'n chain lightning'."

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In single file they slipped along the side of a ridge that lay between them and the farmhouse, and ended in a little bluff at the right of Job's kitchen ell. It was covered with young maples, and rimmed with an old stone wall grown over with raspberry bushes. Once upon the bluff, they crawled forward to the wall. There, quite concealed, they could look either into Job's kitchen or into the barn, neither more than a hundred yards away.

Parting the bushes carefully, Willard peered out. Suddenly he ducked his head, and at the same time pressed Bert's into the earth. "He's feedin' the calf," he said, "in his best clothes, too."

Bert peered out in his turn. He was much excited — though he hardly knew why.

"See old Calvin," whispered Willard;

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and, partly in the spirit of the game, partly to play upon the "greenness" of the city boy, he continued in a hoarse whisper, "Don't you dast move. If old Cal gets you, you 're a dead Injun. He 's fierce. Chaw you up like a chicken, smell you out like a bloodhound."

Bert gasped and regarded the peaceable old dog with wide-eyed apprehension.

"He won't come up here, will he?" he asked.

"Naw. He ain't suspectin' anythin'. We 're all hunky-dory s' long as he don't suspect anythin'.

"Look at Rufe," Willard went on, "putting stockin's in that old carpet-bag. Father, he says Rufe's father was a thief. He says Job had n't no right to hire him. I tell you father's locked things up mighty tight since that long-legged fel-

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ler come round. There he goes down to the barn."

Then Willard had an idea. "Say," he exclaimed, "I know the boss trick! Old Bixby's got all his fine clothes in that carpet-bag. Let's take 'em out and hide 'em! What do you say?"

"Fine!" said Bert, with delight.

"I tell you, you just slip down there and get 'em. You'd better do it. Job don't know you, and if he caught sight of you, he would n't know who 't was. He'd know me in a minute. You can do it slick. I'll stay here and watch. If Job or Rufe starts towards the house I'll whistle, and you can cut for the woods."

"But Calvin —" hesitated Bert.

"Did n't I tell you he ain't supectin' anythin'? He won't touch you 'less they put him on the trail. Go on, now. You got to hurry!"

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Willard had complete empire over Bert, who, although somewhat daunted by his fear of Calvin, was moreover tingling to carry out his friend's brilliant idea. So he sneaked away, and presently Willard saw him stealing through the apple trees at the rear of the house. Soon he emerged from behind the kitchen ell, and there, concealed from the two in the barn by the jut of the main house, waved excitedly at Willard, and slipped into the kitchen.

There he hastily pulled the clothes from the carpet-bag. Then fearing that Job would at once notice the slumped look of the now empty bag, he stuffed into it the old clothes that Rufe had gathered together for the scarecrow. That done, he gathered up Job's finery under his arm, dashed from the house, and plunged in among the orchard trees.

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A moment later, out of breath with running and laughter, he sank down beside Willard again. "Oh!" he gasped, "oh, that's the best yet! I swapped old Bixby's clothes for some awful old duds I found there! My, won't he be mad! I threw his things down in the bushes by the brook."

Willard slapped him on the back. "You're the boy!" he cried, while Bert thrilled at the praise. "I tell you you've got spunk! My, don't you wish you could see him when he opens his bag? Don't you hope he gets to the weddin' before he finds out!"

As a matter of fact Job was kept at the barn so long that he had no time to examine his carpet-bag: he had no thought except to get away. The calf finally fed, and he and Rufe once more at the house, he stopped only to sponge

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off his coat before he climbed into his wagon. It was nine minutes past twelve.

"Rufe," he said, as he gathered up the reins, "I'm all-fired late, but I guess I got time to tell ye that me an Hannah's 'greed to take ye to Ellmington if we go there, come winter. Hannah, she kinder thought 't would sarve ye some to go to the Union school for a spell. Guess we can find chores enough to board ye. You be careful how ye feed that calf. Guess ye know now 't ain't so easy. Ged up!"

Jerking the reins, and grasping his precious carpet-bag firmly between the stiff boots which Rufe had "tallered up" so fine, he was off. He sat very straight, and his high rolling collar, his queer beaver hat, and his stubborn chin held high by his old-fashioned stock, gave him a look of grotesque importance and self-satisfaction. Calvin, following after, un-

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noticed and unreprieved, seemed from his look of melancholy resignation to accept as inevitable and predestined the vain elation of his master.

Man, horse, and dog had disappeared in a cloud of dust, and the rattle of the wagon over the half-dozen planks serving as bridge across the brook had almost died down, before Rufe gathered the full meaning of his master's parting words.

All his fears were ill founded! Job was not really going to give up the farm; he was not going to turn him off; Hannah was not his enemy; his new-found home was still to be his! He need regret this wedding no longer. A slow, delighted smile lit up his homely, freckled face. The next moment he flung his straw hat with a delighted whoop at the big rooster. "Well," he shouted, "well! You

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see if I don't take the boss care of *this* farm," and he turned a cartwheel for sheer joy.

Meanwhile, insufficiently protected by Job's best shirts and his flowered waistcoat, the Hannibal and St. Jo Railroad eight per cent coupon bonds, worth ten thousand dollars, were lying in a clump of alders by the brook.

Perhaps there were surprises in store for other persons than Mr. Job Bixby.

II

HANNAH FOSTER, Job's betrothed, in an old calico dress, her arms akimbo, a dust-cloth hanging, gray and limp, from one firm, fat hand, surveyed her parlor with approval. The windows were open, and a small, furtive June breeze now and then pleasantly stirred and swelled the Nottingham curtains.

The neighbors, and the neighbors' children, — for, as Job said, Hannah “was well liked to Ellmington,” — had been sending flowers: clove pinks and larkspur, sweet Williams, foxglove and cinnamon roses from old-fashioned gardens; ladies' slippers and snap-dragon, Dutchmen's breeches and wild violets

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from wood and meadow. They stood in vases and glasses on the small, round marble-top table, now shoved against the wall next the door, beside the sea-shells, the wax flowers, and the photograph album on the what-not, and on the melodeon. And behind the smaller, more delicate flowers, there were great masses of "pinies" that filled the room with their rich crimson.

"Well," she said, "I guess everything's as near ready as it ever will be. There ain't a speck of dust anywheres, and the flowers certainly do look elegant. And out in the kitchen there's a good, square meal, if I do say it myself. I don't know but scalloped oysters and coffee and angel cake and ice-cream would 'a' been more weddin'y some ways. But they ain't noon victuals. Those men will be sharp set. I guess I know. Well, they'll get

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enough, if 't *ain't* all hot. There's two hams, and some cold tongue, and chicken pie, and cole slaw, and I guess there's 'bout every kind of pie and cake anybody knows of. And preserves, and dough-nuts. Mis' Farley and Mis' Meader's comin' in to warm up the chicken-pie and make the coffee, two gallons of it, and Miss Ware and one or two of the other teachers said they'd be pleased to help with the waitin'. It's real good of them. I guess there's no need for any one goin' away hungry."

"Eating ain't everything. I do hope, Hannah, you ain't making a mistake."

Hannah turned a tolerant, humorous eye upon the speaker.

This was Miss Willett. She was a thin, sallow woman with down-drawn mouth, side curls, a back-comb, and a brooch in which the hair of some de-

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funct relative was woven into a true-lover's knot. As she spoke, she sank into a chair, folded her hands primly in her lap, and assumed an expression which said plainly that she knew quite well that such a hope was vain.

"I guess I ain't," said Hannah cheerfully.

She wholly understood her friend's frame of mind. Miss Willett considered herself genteel, and having "some means,"—that is, an income which was just too small to live on,—had been much given to "cousining," until she found Hannah.

Under pretext of some remote relationship, she had come to Hannah six years previously, and, as Hannah had never hinted either that she go away or that she pay board, was still with her. "Hannah's so lonely I consider it my duty not to leave," she often said. She

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was much afraid that Job would turn her out.

"I don't know what's going to become of us," she said.

"You mean you," said Hannah, in a matter-of-fact way. "I guess you need n't worry. Job Bixby's got ten thousand dollars drawing good interest; he's got his farm that 'll sell for a little somethin' over the mortgage—if I can get him to sell it; and I've got this house; and there's room for three in it. And you can stay just as long as you're a mind to. Job's one of the best-hearted fellows ever was, and he won't object, if I don't. Seems though I'd told you all that often enough."

Miss Willett sniffed. "I presume," she began, for her language was elegant, "I presume it ain't slipped your mind how much money he spent just

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to spite 'Bijah Keith. I should think you'd be fearful that he'd waste all his substance just to pamper up his pride. He's always among them that's contrary-minded; you know that, Hannah. But of course you know your own affairs best. It ain't for me to advise. I am aware you think my words but the cracklin' of thorns under a pot. But time will reveal."

Miss Willett referred to an incident in Job's career much chuckled over in Ellmington. Abijah Keith had accused him of a foolish plan to raise potatoes in an over-wet piece of ground near his house. Job, in answer, had planted the potatoes right in the reprobated spot. He "wa'n't goin' to be told," he said, what he "was goin' to do," or what he "wa'n't goin' to do."

Of course the potatoes rotted. Then

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Job had mixed in sand, and planted again; and again the potatoes rotted. Then he had tried to drain the land, but had found there was no place to which to drain: the quarter acre lay in a complete rocky cup. Undaunted, Job had then blasted away a whole ledge, laid drainage tiles, mixed more sand with the soil, and raised the best crop of potatoes that he had ever had in his life.

He sent a bushel to Abijah. He never told, however, that he had sunk so much money in the bog-hole that the best possible crop was raised at a loss.

"No, I hain't forgot it," said Hannah placidly. "I guess anybody that turned Job back after he 'd once got p'inted, would be a bigger man than old King Canuty. I expect he'll be a real interesting man to live with."

"I do hope you are n't nourishing



YOU THINK MY WORDS BUT THE CRACKLIN' OF THORNS UNDER A POT

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vain hopes in your soul," said Miss Willett. " I presume you know the common experience of women who try to make a man over to suit their own predilections. 'T ain't often that they make a success of it, according to my observation. It's my heartfelt hope that you ain't mistaken in thinking you're goin' to get him to give up that farm, and abide to Ellmington. If you don't, it's plain to be seen what's going to become of those bonds. If you were n't so partial to him, you'd know just as well as any one else he'll spend them just to prove he can raise grapes on the north side of a hill — if he takes a notion, and he will just as likely as not."

" Seems to me you're borrowin' a good deal of trouble," said Hannah, with the most imperturbable good-humor. " Job's comin' to the village next winter,

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and I guess when he finds how near he is to all his cronies to the band and to the Post, he'll conclude Ellmington's better'n a farm any day. I ain't worryin' a mite."

"I think it's almost a crime to be so reckless. I speak as your friend. At least, I hope you're sure that Mr. Bixby has n't spent the worth of those bonds already. It does seem to me as if you ought to enquire. I hope I may ask if you have seen the bonds lately?"

"No," said Hannah, "I hain't seen 'em lately, and I hain't seen Africky lately, either. Land sakes, Jane Willett, you cheer up. Job won't bite you."

Hannah patted her on the shoulder: she was sorry for the poor old thing, and in a queer way fond of her. She was quite used to scenes like this and did n't mind them in the least. She

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always "talked up" to her friend; but she never lost her temper, and her real good-humor took all sting out of her words. When Miss Willett complained that she was "unfeelin'," she only laughed.

On this occasion, however, Miss Willett had struck a real subject of worry: Hannah was not more fond of money than a hard-working, poor woman who has learned its value has a right to be; but for Job's own sake, she wanted his little fortune kept and guarded safe. Little by little, she was matching her placid, good-humored, soft persistence against his setness, in the hope of persuading him to give up the farm, which she knew in time would eat up his money, transfer the bonds to her, who would guard them wisely, and settle down in Ellmington. But if he would keep the

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farm, if he should lose the money, she guessed it would be just as well for him to be married to some one who knew a good trade and was n't afraid of hard work.

As she stood there, her hopes and fears all a-flutter in her mind from the jog of Miss Willett's ominous words, she was brought back to the business of the moment and her usual good-humor and joy in action by the sight of a woman coming up the flight of steps which led to her high-perched little brown house.

"Mercy me!" she exclaimed heartily, "if there ain't Miss Bates. She 's goin' to help dress me. You set right here so 's to be handy by when the minister comes. You tell Miss Bates to step right upstairs. And if Mis'Farley or Mis' Meader wants anythin' out to the kitchen, you tell 'em where things be."

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Miss Bates found Hannah in the rear room of the two that were tucked away under the steep pitched roof of the story-and-a-half house. There she helped to dress the bride in the plum-colored silk gown in which she was going to be married. It was a sober costume, made with a polonaise, with ruching at neck and wrists. Hannah had a string of old gold beads, and these she had put around her neck. With her stout figure, fresh, comely face, and competent air, she looked a very comfortable, homelike woman.

Meanwhile the guests were gathering. Hannah owned her house, indeed, but whatever else she had she earned as a seamstress. She sewed for many people, and now they were all coming forth to do her honor on her wedding-day. There was Mrs. Peaslee, grim and forbidding in her stiff black silk; there was the

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meek Solomon, her husband, vaguely smiling and peering about through his big glasses; there was Mrs. Upham and Upham himself, bland apothecary and bandsman, who did not dare sit down because he had his piccolo in his coat-tail pocket; there was the smart and competent Mrs. "Jim" Spencer, in a city gown that set all the women agog; there was pretty Miss Ware, the school-teacher, in a girlish muslin, with Farnsworth, who kept the crockery store, whom she was going to marry; there were Mrs. Barnes and Mrs. Snow, the latter so fat and big as to be almost monumental; there was Mrs. French, a sad, pretty woman in black; there was Mr. Paulding, the stout, good-humored old lawyer; there was Sam Barton, the constable, and Rose, his wife.

And then by and by, in knots of two

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or three, men began sneaking through the side yard to the woodshed, where each left some burden, and then, turning, entered the front door like the rest. These were the members of the Ellmington Military Brass Band, and the burdens they left were their instruments.

After all, they could not keep it very secret that they intended to serenade Job and his bride after the ceremony. They were going to play when the bridal couple left the house, and again "down to the depot" when the train pulled out. Jim Edwards, who, ever since Mr. Peaslee had given him a harmonica, had taken deep interest in music, sat in the woodshed and proudly guarded the instruments. Abel Potts had promised him that when the time came he might hold up the front of the bass drum.

By and by, the minister, Mr. Clark, a

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thin, tall young man in a very long black frock coat and white tie, arrived. Miss Willett, wiping away a tear, gave him a limp, moist hand in welcome, and departed with funereal dignity to let Hannah know of his coming.

By heroic effort, Miss Willett had thus far shed only an occasional tear, but when she saw Hannah in the plum-colored silk, she sank limply into the nearest chair and gave way to the luxury of grief.

"I do hope," she wailed, "you'll find it all you expect. I'm sure I'm not one to predict trouble."

But people had begun to wonder what was keeping Job, for it now lacked but three minutes to twelve, the hour of the ceremony. Mrs. Snow and Mrs. Upham stepped upstairs, not only to see the bride but also to lend her their moral support in case she was getting anxious.

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Hannah, however, showed her usual placidity. "Lawsee!" she cried, "if you'd rid behind that old white horse of Job's as often as I have, you would n't expect him to be over and above prompt."

They left the door of the room open so that they could see the bridegroom the very moment he appeared on the stairs. The chamber opposite had been set aside for Job "to slick up in," as his bride expressed it. When both were ready, they were to go downstairs together.

Finally, at nearly half past twelve, Job drove into the side yard. He was immediately hailed by three or four bandsmen, who, unaccustomed to social functions, had preferred the yard to the house. They were boisterously jovial to give themselves a countenance.

"Lean your old hoss up against the

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fence," called Tip Willard, a house-painter by trade and a cornetist by avocation ; "she 's so stiff she won't bend !"

" Knew you was coming," cried Hank Fellows, the big, fat stableman, who played the trombone ; " heard your old wagon rattle the minute you turned out of your yard. Fact !"

They surrounded Job, as he lifted out his old carpet-bag and turned toward the house, and slapped him on the back, and told him not to get scared and to do the band credit.

" Wall," boomed Job, in his big voice, " I fought through the war. Guess I ain't scared of a weddin' !"

His upturned face was wreathed in smiles as he scrambled up the steep stairs. " How do, Miss Bates ; how do, Mis' Snow ; how do, Mis' Upham," he called to the women who crowded about

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the head of the stairway. "Why, Hannah!" he exclaimed delightedly, as he caught sight of the plum-colored silk, "you look mighty peart; now don't she?" and he smiled round upon the laughing women, right and left. "I swanny, I hate dretful to be late, but that calf of mine gaveme a heap of trouble. Hannah, I did n't have time to go to the bank, so I fetched them bonds right 'long to the house. I guess mebbe Peaslee'll take 'em over. I saw him downstairs."

As he talked, Job mounted the stairway. On the top step he knelt, put his bag down on the landing at the feet of the crowding women, and opened it.

The smile vanished from his face when he saw, in the mouth of it, the jammed and battered old straw hat which Rufe had picked out for the scarecrow. Mrs. Upham gave a hysterical giggle

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when he lifted it out and laid it on the step.

“What in tunket!” said Job, as he drew forth next the tightly rolled, faded old coat, which, flopping open upon the landing, displayed its yellowish-green streaks and ripped seams.

“Well,” said Mrs. Snow, “I’ve heard of men doing queer things at weddings when they got worked up and excited, but of all the outlandish —”

At this point Job drew forth a pair of old blue overalls to which clung many a wisp of yellow hay, and gazed blankly into the now empty bag. Then, in feverish haste, he pawed and fumbled over these strange articles of clothing. His consternation grew. Then he lifted a dismayed face, his blue eyes showing big and perplexed through their screen of eyebrow.

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“Why!” he roared, “why, the bonds ain’t here!”

Hannah stepped forward, as one who takes command, and gingerly lifted the articles one after another. “Who packed that carpet-bag for you, anyway?” she asked.

“Why, me and Rufe, we did. But we didn’t put any o’ them things in ’t. Them’s the old duds Rufe picked out for a scarecrow. I tell ye — I tell ye there’s been crime committed. Where’s Barton?” and Job half rose, as if to start at once downstairs.

“Now you just wait a minute,” said Hannah incisively. “It looks ’s though some one’s been playin’ a joke on ye. If that’s so, then the bonds is probably all safe up to the farm. If they’re stole, they’re stole, and that’s the end on ’t. We can ’tend to that afterwards. There

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ain't any sense interruptin' the weddin', as I can see, — not with the minister come, and all them victuals that's got to be et up."

"Seems if there *was* some sense," said Job. "Stands to reason if I've lost them bonds, and hain't got any money, I can't marry ye, Hannah. 'T would n't be fair."

"Cat's foot!" said Hannah.

But at this point Miss Willett attracted sudden attention to herself by bursting into sobs. "Oh, oh, oh, that I should live to see the last friend I've got throwing herself away all blind and confidin'!" she wailed from behind her handkerchief. "It seems as if you must be quite bereft of your senses, Hannah, to go marrying a man without any money. How are we — how are you going to live? What's going to become of you,

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I don't know, you poor, self-deceivin' creature!"

"Why, Miss Willett," said Hannah, "the bonds ain't lost —"

"I have n't said they're lost," came in a muffled whine from behind the handkerchief. "I told you just how 't would be. I warned you. If you had harkened to advice this misfortune would never have come on you. I hope I have too much dignity to make charges I can't maintain; but I presume you know what I'm thinking. There's other ways of losing money than raising potatoes in bog-holes, and some folks are so innocent, that they can be deceived by play-acting —"

"Jane Willett, you speak out what you're thinkin' square and plain," cried Hannah, provoked, "and stop hintin'."

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Miss Willett suddenly sat upright, and took the handkerchief from her eyes. "I am not afraid to speak my mind when called upon. It's my opinion Mr. Bixby no longer has those bonds; it's plain to be seen he's spent them."

"You think I'm lyin' 'bout them bonds!" thundered Job, rising to his feet, thrusting his fingers through his hair till it stood up like a picket fence, and glaring at Miss Willett with the eyes of an outraged lion.

Miss Willett, shrinking visibly, shut off the blaze of Job's eyes with her handkerchief, and answered only with sobs. She had a diffused, amorphous obstinacy which offered the resistance of a feather-bed: words were as unavailing against the one as blows against the other.

"Now Job, now Job," said Hannah, an

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anxious hand upon his arm, "don't ye mind her, don't ye mind her."

"If folks think I'm lyin' 'bout them bonds," thundered Job, shaking off her hand, "I won't get married till I find 'em!"

"Now, Job," implored Hannah, "the bonds are sure to turn up. Just be sensible—there ain't anybody goin' to believe that 'cept Jane Willett, and I guess she don't really." An unusually loud sniff came from Miss Willett at this. "Here I am all dressed up, and the minister here and everythin'. We can't disappoint folks so."

"I won't get married till I find them bonds!" said Job, and his jaws locked till the willful lines round his mouth showed deep and plain.

"That your last word?" said Hannah, in a tone dangerously low and tense,

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while the terror-stricken women looked on in awed silence.

"I won't get married till I find 'em," said Job.

Mrs. Upham gave a frightened giggle: her gaze had happened to drop from Job's set and tragic face to the old greenish coat and the blue overalls at his feet — no proper carpet for a tragedian.

Hannah Foster could lose her temper. Sensations of a disagreeable kind had assailed her one after another with increasing force ever since Job had appeared upon the staircase. She had not greatly minded Mrs. Upham's giggles and the more discreet amusement of the other women at the extraordinary nature of Job's trousseau; but their surprise had been a sharp enough pin-prick after all; she could have withstood the shock of finding that her lover had lost his

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bonds; but in spite of her sensible suspicion of a bad joke, her anxiety was keen.

But when there was added Miss Willett's selfish and malicious insult to a good man for whom she felt a deep affection, her self-control was strained to a dangerous degree. When upon all this fell Job's ill-timed fit of obstinacy, the strength of which she well knew, and she saw, in a flash, the whole dreadful scandal,—the interrupted wedding, the subsequent gossip, the awkwardness, the laughter, the spoiled food,—especially the spoiled food,—her temper flared out and scorched — the last offender, of course.

"Well," she said tensely, "if that's your last word, Job Bixby, then you listen to mine. I won't marry you if you *do* find 'em."

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Miss Willett stopped sobbing and looked at Hannah with frightened eyes, which grew wider and more frightened when Hannah turned upon her.

“Miss Willett,” she said, “I see ‘Gene Silver out in the yard. You tell me where you want your trunk sent to and I’ll call him in. I guess he can tend to it right now, long ‘s there ain’t goin’ to be any weddin’.”

III

JOB'S stentorian declaration that he was not going to marry Hannah till he found his bonds had, of course, been heard throughout the little house. It produced an immediate deep hush of wonderment and dismay, in which Hannah's ultimatum came to the intent ears of the wedding guests with crisp and refreshing distinctness. Job had found his match, then, for once; and the interest in the contest of wills was so keen that none but a few sober business men like Mr. Paulding even wondered, at the moment, how Job had lost his bonds.

Mr. Clark, the minister, shocked out of his usual shyness and self-distrust,

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started upstairs — only to meet Job coming down. Job cast upon him an angry and dominating eye.

“ I ain’t goin’ to cheat ye out ’n your pay,” he thundered, “ not now I got ye here.” And thrusting a greenback into the limp hands of the astonished and dazed young man, he brushed by him before he could catch his breath to protest.

Job stalked into the midst of the company, glaring at the hostile, amused, shocked, or embarrassed faces that confronted him.

“ Ye might’s well go home — all on ye,” he announced grimly. “ There ain’t goin’ to be any weddin’ — not yet. Barton,” he added, “ I want ye.” And, turning, he marched from the room.

His riotous mane all on end, his blue eyes gleaming and glaring through his

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bushy eyebrows, the curves of his resolute mouth bent down round his projecting chin, Job looked so fierce that the guests began to back away from him on every side. Only Miss Ware, the schoolmistress, gave a little gasp of amusement — Job so comically reminded her of a red, aggressive small boy who, smarting from recent discipline, dares his mates to laugh !

The three or four shy bandsmen who, conscious of social disability, had preferred to sit on the grass out in the yard rather than venture into the house, started up eagerly when Job appeared.

“ Guess your hoss will get you to the depot,” cried Hank Fellows, the stableman, jovially. “ I ’ve been oiling his joints while — ”

At this point he caught Job’s eye.

“ Thunderation ! ” he broke off.

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He stared at his companions, and they at him. Then by a common impulse they all stared at the house. Men and women were leaving by the front door in a queer, puzzling quiet. They wore the oddest expressions on their faces. Presently the other bandsmen began sneaking round to the shed in a self-conscious way: they seemed to want to get their instruments and go without attracting too much attention.

Grasping one of them by the arm, Hank held with him a whispered colloquy, and came back, comic astonishment on his round, fat face, and told the news.

"Better play the dead march, I guess," remarked Tip Willard, under his breath.

"Well, that's about as fast as I want to march away from all those victuals, that's a fact," replied Hank.

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And on their way to the shed, the disconsolate bandsmen sent hungry glances in at the loaded tables.

"Say, don't you know one of them women?" muttered Tip.

But Hank shook his head. He knew them both perfectly well, but he did not dare to speak to them, much less beg food in this tragic juncture. "'T would n't be manners," he muttered. "What ails Job Bixby, anyhow? Why can't he get married sensible?"

Meanwhile Jim Edwards with astonished eyes was watching Job and big Sam Barton. The burly constable, a faint expression of amusement upon his good-humored face, swung himself up into the Concord wagon beside Job. The white horse turned clumsily till the wheel screeched against the guard. Then the big hubs began to rattle in the iron

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sockets, and Job, who though his tall hat was a little awry, looked inflexible as granite, drove up the road toward the farm, through the ranks of bandsmen, gloomily departing with their cased instruments.

Sam Barton had a long grass-stem in his mouth, which gave him a contemplative air, and as they went along he glanced now and then at Job, as if mildly wondering what queer species of animal he was driving with anyway. Sam was an easy-going person. He was Hannah's cousin, to be sure, but he did not feel called upon to act as her champion. He said to himself comfortably that it was none of his fight: he guessed "she and Job could jaw it out between 'em." As for the bonds, "Shucks," he reflected, "'tain't likely they're stole."

He was willing enough, however, to

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go up to the farm and look the ground over, if that was what Job wanted. As he had been near the foot of the stairs, he had heard everything. He was proud of Hannah for having acted with so much spirit.

"Broke off the match kind of sudden, did n't you?" he asked finally, with a casual air.

"Hain't broke it off," snapped Job. "Just put it off a leetle. We'll get married just as soon's ever I get them bonds."

"Hannah agreein' to that?" said Sam, giving a flirt to his grass-stem, and a sly look at Job.

Job jerked the reins, and said "Ged-ap," but returned no answer.

"Well," resumed Sam meditatively, "I know Hannah pretty well, *pret-ty* well. She's some sot herself."

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"Yes, she 's sot," assented Job, a small confident smile curving his lips, "but she ain't so sot as I be."

"Well, if a woman won't marry you," argued Sam blandly, "I don't see what good bein' sot's goin' to do. When you find your bonds, what you goin' to do next? Takin' one thing with another, seems 's though *her* bein' sot had a good deal more to do with it than *your* bein' sot. Seems so to me."

"You just wait," said Job. "'T won't hurt ye."

Sam smiled covertly: it was his opinion that Job had kicked over his kettle of fish and knew it. Having reached this conclusion he pushed the point no further.

"Well," he said, "I guess what we're after is the bonds. You got any theory?"

But the question remained unan-

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swered. There was a pounding of hoofs behind them which made both men turn round. There, seated in his sulky behind his fast colt, came Esek Marvin, his long whiskers blown backward by the wind.

His face lit up with a malicious smile when he recognized Job.

"Hear ye lost your bonds!" he shouted. "Course ye ain't suspectin' that boy o' yourn, though!" And he passed in a cloud of dust.

"When I get them bonds," said Job, "I'll get me a *hoss*. I'm sick of eatin' his dust."

By "that boy o' yourn" Esek of course meant Rufe Holt. Rufe was one of the many grievances against his neighbor that had accumulated in Esek's mind since their quarrel over the fence. The boy's father, now dead, had been a drunken ne'er-do-well, with a doubtful

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reputation for honesty, who had left him to the care of a stepmother of harsh temper and heavy hand. The warm-hearted Job had been tempted to take the boy to help in his bachelor house-keeping and about the farm: the dollar a week which he could pay would reconcile the woman to the loss of Rufe's labor, and the boy could go to school. But the neighbors remonstrated: they told Job that he "had n't any right to bring any of that thievin' tribe round among honest folks."

When the first man presented this view, Job merely glared at him from under his bushy eyebrows, and grunted. When the domineering Esek had undertaken to deal with him, he had turned in righteous indignation. "Marvin," he bellowed, "I'll 'gree to pay ye for all ye lose."



HEAR YE LOST YOUR BONDS

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Then, muttering something savage about "perfessors," he had straightway harnessed the white horse and fetched Rufe to his house before nightfall. The grateful boy had worked for him with such fidelity and zeal that every one in the neighborhood was soon convinced that he was trustworthy—every one, that is, except Esek, who was of a hard, suspicious nature, and who, moreover, wanted to prove Job in the wrong.

"There's some men," said Sam, judicially, "that I'd like to boot from here to Canady. Rufe ain't stealin' any bonds, and Esek knows it."

But Job's face had turned enigmatic. He became very much preoccupied with a horsefly that was trying to settle on his old steed's neck. Esek irritated Job worse than the fly irritated his horse, whose skin was much thicker than his

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master's. But Job didn't know quite how to resent Esek's remark.

He guessed he'd suspect Rufe if he wanted to, he said to himself, but that was not satisfactory, for, as a matter of fact, he did not want to suspect the boy. "Guess he thinks I'm goin' to fight for Rufe 'gainst all the evidence," he thought. "Course Rufe did n't do it; but Jehoshaphat! I guess I can show Marvin I'm reasonable. There ain't any harm considerin' Rufe's case. 'T won't commit me to anythin'. I ain't goin' to have him say I'm contrary just to *be* contrary."

And these thoughts having passed through his mind, he spoke.

"Yes," said he, "Esek's meaner'n tunket. But I guess we'd better kinder look at all sides. I ain't one to be contrary just to *be* contrary."

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“Great snakes!” exclaimed Sam, turning upon him, “you don’t think that little feller —” He broke off, overcome with surprise at this unexpected twist in Job’s mental processes.

Sam’s outburst naturally increased Job’s desire to argue the case: just to show Sam that something was to be said for suspecting Rufe, he began to search for evidence. Naturally enough, the arguments which the neighbors had used in their protests were the ones which first came to him.

“A feller had n’t ought to regard his private feelin’s in a ser’us case,” said Job. “There’s consid’able of an argy-mint against Rufe, when ye come to think on’t. Like father, like son. Guess ye knew old Holt. He did n’t ever cut his own cord-wood, nor raise his own chickens. ’T wa’n’t safe to leave any-

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thin' out where he could get his claws on 't."

"You ain't goin' to take up with those ideas after all this time, are you?" exclaimed Sam.

"Seems though they 'd ought to have some weight," said Job, nettled. "Guess they ain't lost any just from bein' old."

"Well, if you ain't—!" said Sam, exasperated. "What makes you think he did it, anyhow? Squire Tucker won't jail him just because his father took a nip now and then, and borrowed his cord-wood."

"That ain't the whole on't," said Job, whom Sam's opposition was heating more and more. "Who else was they, I sh'd like to know? He knew I had 'em. He saw me wrop 'em up in my silk weskit; he saw me put 'em in the carpet-bag. He was alone with 'em a good

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fifteen minutes, an' I don't know but twenty. The' wa'n't any one else round *to* see 'em. You got to consider all them things."

Sam chewed his stem of grass indignantly. "Now look a-here, Job," he said, "what's that little feller want of bonds? He can't do anything with 'em. He couldn't sell 'em, nor collect the interest on 'em. He'd be worse off 'n he was before, 'cause you could n't 'ford to keep him. And anyway, he thinks you're the biggest man livin', since you took him in. Seems though you had n't got any common sense at all when you get started!"

"'T ain't common sense to foller your feelin's," snapped Job, now in full course, "not when ye're tryin' to onravel a crime! Rufe ain't anythin' but a boy that ain't had any bringin' up. Tempta-

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tion come on him kinder sudden-like, and he fell, — not thinkin', I expect." Job suddenly slapped his knee. "I got it!" he cried, "I got it! Rufe was grum as a sick rooster all mornin'. I found out afterwards he thought I was goin' to give up the farm and send him off. He took them bonds a-purpose to break up the weddin'!"

"That 's a likely idea," said Sam.

"Wall, 't is," retorted Job. "You'll see. I guess he'll own right up when it's put to him. Ye need n't think I'm goin' to be ha'sh with the leetle feller. I guess I can make 'lowances. If he gives them bonds back peaceable, I don't cal'late to do nothin' much. Guess ye can't fault me much for speakin' to him!"

Job was now thoroughly convinced both of Rufe's guilt and his own magnanimity.

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Sam at length realized his mistake. "Guess I pulled the trigger that time," he thought contritely; and thenceforth he chewed his grass-stem in silence.

Without further talk, they drove along the pleasant, dusty June road until the old horse turned of his own accord up the driveway leading into Job's side yard.

Rufe, too much astonished to move, stood on the kitchen porch. "Why!" he said, "Why! Ain't you goin' to be married, Mr. Bixby? Where's Miss Foster? Ain't you goin' to Burlington?"

Barton looked at him. The boy's homely, freckled, ingenuous face, with its expression of frank astonishment and perplexity, filled the constable with the conviction that here was no criminal.

"Rufe," said Job, "you step into the

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kitchen a minute. Mr. Barton and me, we want to have a leetle talk with ye 'bout matters and things. Set down," he added, when they got into the room; and he sat down, himself, directly in front of the astonished boy, and put his hands on his knees in an attitude suitable, he thought, for sharp cross-questioning.

He glared at Rufe for a moment in a way to show him that he must prepare for serious talk. Sam leaned against the kitchen sink and chewed on a new grass-stem which he had picked from beside the broken mill-stone which served as step to the kitchen stoop.

"Rufe," began Job impressively, "there 's been a crime committed."

Rufe's eyes grew wide, and he stared at his benefactor, open-mouthed. He said nothing: it was obvious enough

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to Sam that he had no idea that the statement had any personal implications. His attitude was entirely that of an astonished and interested listener.

"Yes," continued Job, "them bonds has been stole."

"Them Hannibal and St. Jo Railroad eight per cent coupon bonds, worth ten thousand dollars!" cried Rufe, aghast.

"Them's the ones," said Job.

"And say!" exclaimed Rufe, struck with a sudden idea. "They took them old duds I got out for the scarecrow, too. They must be awful sinful fellers!"

"Yes," said Job dryly, "I found 'em in the old carpet-bag."

"Not when you got to the weddin'!"

"Yes," said Job, "when I got to the weddin'."

"My!" said Rufe, "you must 'a' been awful mad. Who do you think done it?"

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"Wall, now, Rufe," said Job, "that's what me and the constable has come to inquire. You can't guess, can ye?"

The boy's eyes widened still more. "Why," he said, "I saw you put 'em in the bag, and I hain't seen 'em since. They must have took 'em while you an' me was out to the barn."

"They must have took 'em while *I* was out to the barn, that's sartain," said Job, his blue eyes accusing the boy. "Guess ye remember there was n't a soul passed the house the whole mornin'. Guess ye know if they had, we'd 'a' seen 'em."

"I guess that's so," Rufe assented.

"Wall, now," continued Job, while Sam stirred uneasily at the sink, "you see, don't ye, where that lands ye? Guess ye remember I went to the barn first. Far's I can see you were the only

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feller knowin' to them bonds anywheres round that had a chance to get at 'em. What was you a-doin' of when I left ye here alone?"

Rufe comprehended at last. Job suspected him; nay, more, this man who had befriended him, who, he thought, would always be kind to him, considered him a thief. He looked at the big, imperturbable Barton, the constable! He looked at Job,—looked into his stern, convinced, unyielding eyes.

The boy had a sense of character: he knew quite well how tenaciously Job held to an idea. An agony of helpless indignation, outraged loyalty, and blank despair shook him from head to foot and stopped his breath. He turned white, and gasped and choked. Then he burst into sobs.

"Honest, Mr. Bixby, honest, I did n't

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take 'em. You know I did n't," he cried. "Honest, Mr. Bixby, honest."

Sam glanced at Job: the constable felt that the farmer must see his mistake; the boy was so obviously innocent. But Job showed no signs of relenting. Any one who disputed him was wrong, and this boy was disputing him. That kind of reasoning had the force of a syllogism for Job. Had the boy admitted that Job was right in his suspicion, the warm-hearted old soldier would have forgiven him on the spot and have been kinder to him than ever.

"Rufe," he said sternly, "don't ye lie, now, don't ye lie. If ye tell me what ye did with 'em right out square an' honest, I won't be hard on ye. Truth always bears good int'rurst, I guess ye know, and lyin' 's always taxed pretty consid'able heavy in the long run."

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"Honest, I did n't take 'em. I hain't ever stole anything from anybody; you know I hain't," wailed Rufe.

"Don't ye get stubborn," warned Job. "There ain't anythin' wuss 'n stubbornness that hain't any judgment and sense behind it. It'll be all the wuss for ye if ye don't own up."

"Oh, land!" groaned Sam to himself.

"But I did n't, Mr. Bixby; you know I did n't."

Job turned away from him. "I guess ye see how 't is," he said to Sam with conviction. "I 've done all I could to get it out'n him. I don't see nothin' for 't but to 'rest him. Mabbe that'll larn him."

At this, Rufe flung himself violently on the floor, and grabbed fast hold of the legs of the kitchen table. The idea of arrest frightened him out of all self-con-

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trol. Jail! — in his family the word had a definite reality of meaning. His outcries were so loud that Willard Marvin, who, attracted by the return of Job with the constable, was watching the house from his secure hiding-place on the knoll, was filled with a fearsome delight.

“The’ ain’t anything to arrest him for,” said Sam. “There ain’t hardly a mite of evidence.” Bending over the boy, he put his hand kindly on his shoulder. “You get up,” he said, “and run along home to your ma. There ain’t anybody goin’ to hurt you.”

Job stared at him incredulously. Then, as he realized how completely the constable was setting aside his decision as to what should be done, he bristled at once.

“You ain’t goin’ to ’rest him?” he asked sharply. “Ain’t you the constable, I sh’d like to know!”

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"I guess I am," said Sam calmly, "but I don't believe he did it."

"Don't I tell ye he did?"

"I guess that don't settle it," answered Sam dryly. "There ain't hardly a mite of evidence. I ain't goin' to arrest him on my own risk."

"Well, I guess you'll 'rest him," said Job, with set jaws.

"You get a warrant first," said Sam.

"I will, don't ye fret!" thundered Job, outraged. "I'll go right back to Ellington now."

And without further ado, Job jumped again into his Concord wagon and turned the astonished but meekly submissive old horse once more toward the village. The mournful Calvin, however, refused to budge; he sat on his haunches in the middle of the yard with the air of one disgusted at this ebullition of the old Adam.

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Sam laughed when he saw that he was left behind. But he did not care. It was only a mile across the shoulder of hill that separated the farm from Ellmington. He shut the kitchen door and then hesitated: he did not quite like to leave the house open. The next moment he caught sight of Rufe peeping round the corner of the barn.

"Say," he called, "what does Job do when he leaves the house?"

"You put the key under the doormat," said Rufe, coming forward. His face still showed the trace of tears, but he did not act as if he intended to leave.

Sam regarded him curiously. "Why ain't you gone home?" he asked.

Rufe dug his bare toe into the ground and grinned sheepishly. "I guess some one's got to look after the critters," he said finally.

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“ Well, I’ll be jiggered,” declared Sam. It crossed his mind that Rufe was a loyal soul. “ That’s clever of you,” he said, “ after what’s happened and all.” Then it occurred to him that Job must have treated the boy pretty well to call forth such devotion. “ Job Bixby means well, I guess,” he added, “ but he’s a sot old fool — mostly.”

He was astonished to see Rufe fling up his head, his face red with sudden anger.

“ No, he ain’t either!” the boy cried, his voice shrill with rage. “ I don’t care if he is sot, anyway! I guess it’s mighty lucky for the country he was sot down to Cedar Creek!”

“ Jehoshaphat!” said Sam, full of admiration. “ You’re a regular little buzz-saw, ain’t ye?” And ruminating on this unexpected burst of loyal wrath, he swung off up the hill.

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Willard Marvin watched Sam until he was out of sight; then making a little détour to avoid revealing his lurking-place, he approached Rufe.

"Get a lickin'?" he asked with a grin.

"No," answered Rufe, and shut his mouth so tight that Willard knew there would be no explanation forthcoming of the yells that he had heard. After all, he was n't much interested in what had happened to Rufe. He eyed him a moment.

"Say," he said at length, "what's old Bixby back here for? I thought he was gettin' married."

"Somebody's stole his Hannibal and St. Jo Railroad eight per cent coupon bonds, worth ten thousand dollars," said Rufe, with the importance of one in the secret of a great catastrophe. "My, but they'll catch it, when Mr. Bixby gets 'em!"

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And Rufe threw into the exclamation all the fervor of belief which his own terrible experience had inspired in him.

“ Oh, get out ! ” said Willard incredulously. “ Old Bixby hain’t got any bonds. ”

Nevertheless, he turned a little blue round the lips.

IV

SAM BARTON returned home over the rough shoulder of the hill that thrust its irregular bulk between Job's farm and the village of Ellmington. When he began scrambling down the steep pitch on the village side of the hill, he saw that he was coming out directly behind his cousin Hannah Foster's house.

"Guess I'll drop in, and see how she's feelin'," he said to himself.

The shed door was open, and, walking in without knocking, he found Hannah once more in her calico gown, almost at the end of her task of setting the house in its accustomed order. So far as his quick glance at her face could

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tell him, she had quite recovered her serenity.

"I thought I'd see if there warn't something I could do for you," he said.

"Why, no, thank ye," said Hannah, leaning on her broom, "I don't know's there is—not unless you can eat up some of that food. What I'm goin' to do with it all, I don't know. I've given away and given away, and seems if there was more left than there was when I started. It's a dretful waste." And Hannah's face clouded at the thought, but lit up again at the thought that followed. "I guess your young ones wouldn't mind a few o' them sugared nut-cakes, Sam, and I guess I know who'd take a pie or two home with him." Then, as if suddenly illuminated, she exclaimed, "Sam Barton, you had any dinner? Mercy me, I never once

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thought. Job didn't give ye anythin', did he? You come right into the kitchen and set down. I can feed ye to-day, that's certain." And she smiled a rueful little smile.

"Well," said Sam, "I *am* sharp set, now you mention it. Things 've been so excitin', I most forgot about eatin'."

Sam soon found himself seated at the kitchen table, with some delicious white and pink slices of cold ham, some cold biscuits, and a cup of hot and fragrant tea immediately before him, while, in what artists call "the middle distance," was a custard pie, of a delightful yellow mottled with brown, and an uncut cake truly arctic in its case of white frosting.

"Now you tell me," said Hannah, sitting down opposite him, "has Job found them bonds? I won't deny I was some

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put out to have him fly off the handle so. It's goin' to make a lot of talk. But he meant all right — Job did. It kind o' came to him at first that he had n't ought to marry — not after he'd gone and lost his money. He's real conscientious, Job is. But I guess 't would 'a' ended right then and there if Jane Willett had n't stuck in her oar."

"Where is Miss Willett?" said Sam, reaching out for another slice of ham. He had been vaguely conscious for some time of a lessened tension in the atmosphere of the house.

"She's gone," said Hannah, her eye brightening with remembered anger. "I told her I guessed she'd better."

"You did n't!" exclaimed Sam, holding his knife and fork suspended in admiration.

"Yes, I did," answered his cousin,

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"and I can't say I feel to regret it." Then her expression softened. "I don't know 's I did right. I'm kind o' wonderin' what she'll do. She ain't so pleasant-actin' that many folks will take her in — not 'less she pays 'em."

"I guess you ain't out much there," interjected Sam.

"And if she pays, she'll have to draw some on her principal. I guess I did n't treat her very Christian."

"Christian!" snorted Sam. "I wonder you stood her long 's you did!"

"Mr. Paulding manages her prop'ty, don't he?"

"Yes, I guess so," said Sam. "Why?"

"Well," answered Hannah, in a somewhat shamefaced way, "her goin' 'll lighten expenses consid'able. I don't know 's 't would be more 'n right to hand the difference over to Mr. Paulding —

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't would kinder ease things for her. She need n't know a thing about it. You ready for your pie?"

"Don't you do it, Hannah! You hain't got any call —"

"You ready for your pie?" repeated Hannah.

"Well, yes, I guess I am," said Sam, meekly.

"I guess I'll do it," Hannah went on blandly, as she transferred a quarter of the custard pie to Sam's plate, and he studied her with wondering eyes. "'T will be worth the money to ease my conscience. You need n't say a word about it either — not even to Rose. — You hain't told me if Job's found them bonds."

"Well, no — not to last accounts," answered Sam, attacking his pie with much enthusiasm. "He's got it into his

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head Rufe took 'em. I tell you what, that boy's a mouser! Spunkiest little shaver. I expect Job's cavortin' round the village now trying to get him arrested." And Sam told the story.

"Job'll be mighty sorry he did it—when he comes to his senses," was Hannah's distressed comment. "He's a real good-hearted man. Can't you stop it, some way? Where's Rufe goin'?"

"I told him to go home; but I guess he did n't. 'T isn't a good place to go to, accordin' to what I've heard, and anyhow, Rufe seemed to think he'd got to stay and look after things, no matter what Job did. I guess he can get him arrested, if he's bent on it. There ain't any way of stoppin' him."

"Now I tell ye what ye do," said Hannah earnestly. "You stir round and get Rufe bailed. I'll do what I can, and then

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you tell him to come right here. Now Miss Willett's gone, I'm goin' to be some lonesome. He'll be company, and 't will be real handy to have a boy for the chores. You'll tell him I'll hire him, now, won't ye?"

Sam took a great draught of tea and wiped his mouth. "Hannah," he said, with the solemnity of conviction, "I'm sorry for Job if he don't get you. What you think become of them bonds?"

"Some joker's got them," said Hannah promptly, "and I miss my guess if he ain't wishin' he had n't."

"Think likely. What you goin' to do, now your plans are altered?" and Sam rose from the table.

"Go out sewin', same as usual," answered Hannah. "I'm goin' to Mis' Jim Spencer's to-morrow."

"Well," drawled Sam, with a twinkle,

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"I guess you won't have to keep it up long. Job says he's goin' to marry you, whether or no, soon's he finds them bonds."

"I'd like to see him do it," retorted Hannah, flushing.

Sam looked at her shrewdly. "I snummy," he thought, "I believe she would!" He gave another look at her strong, determined face. "But Job'll have to give her a mighty good excuse, though," he added to himself. "Well," he said aloud, "I guess I better hyper along."

"You look after Rufe, now," called Hannah as he departed.

Once outside the door, Sam glanced at his watch and found that it was ten minutes past three. "I wonder," he thought, "what the old coot's been doin' all this time." And, his big shoul-

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ders rolling as he walked, he strode off "down street" to find out. "Guess he'll r'ar up some when he gets Hannah's word," he chuckled.

Job had rushed for Ellmington, a veritable bull in search of a china shop; but had not gone far before he began to feel a steady pull at his nose-ring. He began to foresee difficulties. He did not know that he had a *prima facie* case against Rufe so strong that none of the various officials with whom "an information" might be "lodged" could decline to act; he did not know what, precisely, made an "information" valid; he did not know how much discretion was allowed the officers of the law.

On the other hand, he knew that Sam had laughed at the evidence and challenged him to get a warrant; that — for

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he shrewdly divined the common opinion of his character — whatever he advanced would be regarded as unreasonable simply because he advanced it; he knew, or thought he knew, that “law ’n’ common sense ain’t the same.” What if he could not get the officials to act?

Moreover, he suspected Sam of a desire to thwart him. As he drove along, he kept a wary eye cocked toward the big hill at his right, and presently caught sight of the constable swinging vigorously over its crest.

“I’ll get there first, ye meddlin’ lum-mux,” he growled. Nevertheless he slapped the reins impatiently upon the back of the slow white horse; the “lum-mux” would not be far behind him. Suppose the first man whom he saw refused him: Sam would be ahead of him with the others. “He’ll tell ’em some cock-an’-

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bull story 'bout me and Rufe that 'll set 'em all laughin' so 's there won't be any listen *to* 'em," he decided wrathfully.

Bristling and growling like a bear over each imaginary obstacle as it occurred to him, and growing more bent on Rufe's arrest with the thought of each, he turned a sharp bend in the road, and came plump on Abel Jones. Abel was seated in his buggy beside the road, and "dickering" with Harvey Piper, who in overalls and shirt-sleeves had stepped down from his barn for the purpose.

If Job wanted Rufe arrested, Jones was the very man! This lean, sandy-haired, harsh-featured individual, whom self-importance clothed as with a garment, was not merely a commission man dealing in butter, cheese, and eggs; he was town grand-juror and vested with considerable powers. Always greedy of

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public attention, Abel had from the first seen in the stolen bonds a chance to make himself conspicuous. The moment he caught sight of Job he hailed him eagerly.

“Oh, Bixby,” he called, “about those bonds. I was just driving up to your place to —”

From under his shaggy eyebrows Job shot a swift glance at him, noted with grim pleasure that his “mouth was just waterin’ for the job” and — drove by him as if he were a tree! As he turned a contemptuous back upon the pair, his vain ears were flattered by Piper’s appreciative chuckle.

Abel was the man whose bill Job had paid with indignant exactness by cutting a cent in two — at an extra expense of fully a dollar and a half for a hammer and a hatchet!

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"Guess I can get Rufe 'rested without *his* help," he reflected. "Hain't spoke to him for three year and I guess I won't begin — not just yet."

Nevertheless he shook his head. Here was another official, besides those whom Sam would set against him, with whom he could not treat! "I'll get me a lawyer," he suddenly decided, "one o' them slick-tongued fellers they've got to listen to."

And as the old horse plodded along, he ran over in his mind the lawyers of the village. Somehow none of the reputable ones seemed to suit! The evidence against Rufe surely did not need to be dishonestly amplified, but perhaps it did need to be smoothly, plausibly, cleverly stated.

"What's the differ how I catch him, long's I know he done it?" argued Job.

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A sly, satisfied smile suddenly wrinkled his eyes: he had thought of Jake Hibbard — lean, battered, seedy old fox of the law, a green patch over one eye, an empty sleeve pinned on the breast of his greasy frock-coat. “Guess he’ll do ’bout ’s I tell him,” he chuckled. “Guess he’s slick enough for ’em!”

Upon this triumphant thought, the wayside houses thickened, the country road became the village street. At sight of Job, loafers on the tavern-stoop began to point and smile, curious faces appeared at shop windows, passers on the sidewalk stood and stared.

“Hain’t they ever seen anybody afore!” thought Job angrily, and straightened. Holding high his stubborn head under its queer beaver hat, he drove defiantly down the street, straight to the brick block in which, over Farley’s store,

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was Hibbard's office—Hibbard, whom to employ was to defy respectable opinion!

There half a dozen hunched-up youths, friends of Willie Potter, Farley's clerk, who were loafing on the wooden porch, watched him with malicious eyes as he hitched his horse. Using his best limp to impress the boys, he turned and clattered up the worn, crooked old stairway that led to the lawyer's office.

Then he stopped short—with a grunt of disgust. On Hibbard's door was pinned a dirty paper whereon were scrawled the words:—

BACK IN HALF AN HOUR.

“What kind of a piece d'ye call that!” he boomed into the empty hall. “Half hour just startin' or just endin', I sh'd like to know! Idjit!”

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Back he clattered to the street and faced the boys. "Here you," he bellowed, fixing Willie Potter with a fierce and threatening eye, "you seen Jake Hibbard?"

"No, I hain't," said Willie.

"Gump!" muttered Job. He climbed into his wagon, and jerking the reins viciously, uttered an explosive "geddap, you." At the instant Willie Potter had a malicious inspiration.

"Out for 'half an hour,' wa'n't he, Mr. Bixby?" he chirped impudently.

"What's that?" cried Job. "Whoa, you! Found your tongue, have ye? That's what it said on the door."

"Well," said Willie, in an irritating drawl, "that sign's pinned there by the week, mostly."

Job glared at him doubtfully: then let his dismayed eyes wander question-

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ingly over the crowd. "Skinny" Young crooked an elbow suggestively.

"Humph!" said Job, and drove off. If that mishap had befallen Jake! Nevertheless, Job set out doggedly to find him.

For two mortal hours, poor Job, growing hungrier and angrier, and more defiant of all snickering Ellmington, searched high and low for the missing lawyer — without finding any one who had even seen him! On the other hand, he was sure that he met Jones at every turn — the willing Jones, to whom he had only to speak to get his purpose promptly accomplished! Jones, whose business kept him much upon the street, and who perhaps still hoped that Job would relent, passed him now with hurt dignity, now with seeking, conciliatory eyes, now with assumed indifference.

The first time they met, Job gave a

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reminiscent chuckle. "Guess that snicker o' Piper's 'll cost him somethin' 'fore Abel gets through with him," he said to himself. The second time, the tone of his thought was less humorous: "Look big and pious as a meetin'-house, don't ye! Humph — holler as a pump log, that's what you be." The third time, he was thoroughly annoyed: "Drat ye! Ye're worse 'n a hoss-fly!"

Towards the end of the two hours, when Job in his most peppery mood was urging his tired beast up to the steps of the post-office, where a crowd was awaiting the distribution of the five o'clock mail, the two men met once more — to the entire loss of Job's self-control.

As they both drove up to the curb, — Abel with the innocent intention of getting his mail, Job in the course of his futile search for Jake, — Job rose up in

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his wagon looking hot as a Christmas pudding. The nap of his beaver hat was like the fur of a wet cat; his face was red with heat and moist with perspiration; his high stock obviously fretted his neck; his black clothes were thick with dust; his boots, which poor Rufe had "tallered up" so fine for the wedding, were covered with a gray paste of grease and dust; and his blue eyes, through their screen of heavy eyebrows, glanced and gleamed like lightning behind clouds. Up he rose, and thrusting an offensive finger straight into the face of the astonished Jones, he thundered out:—

"Tag me 'round all ye've a mind to, you—you sutler! Like to get your crooked finger in the pie, now, would n't ye! Well, ye won't!" And the "won't" had all the sudden force of an explosion of dynamite.

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A roar of laughter burst from the men on the post-office steps : they had no idea what caused the attack, but the grotesqueness of Job's wrath, the blankness in Abel's face, were irresistible. Job turned upon them next : prominent in the front row were the good-humored, imperturbable Sam, the shrewd, quizzical Squire Tucker, Justice of the Peace, and the smart young State's Attorney, Paige, looking in his blue-serge suit and straw hat as fresh as a head of lettuce. Their frank amusement was to Job as a red rag to a bull.

"Laugh, will ye, laugh!" he shouted. "I'll get that boy o' mine 'rested in spite of the whole on ye! I'll show ye!"

And with that ringing defiance, he drove off up the street—the dramatic effect lessened somewhat by the fact that

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he could not get his tired horse out of a walk.

The assailed officials stared at each other blankly: what did the man mean? Tucker and Paige turned to Sam for explanations.

"I'll be shot if I know," said he. "I didn't arrest the boy because I don't believe he did it. I thought I'd make Job get a warrant. I'll have to make the arrest the minute he gets one, of course."

Job went back to Jake's office: he would look in there once more. "Mebbe that half-hour that don't begin anywhere and likely's not ends in the same place, 's 'bout up," he said to himself.

His face brightened when he saw that the notice was no longer pinned to the panel. He opened Jake's door in no gentle fashion and found his man!

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“Back, be ye!” he cried; and, standing over the fragile lawyer like a tyrannical schoolmaster over a small child, he told him what he thought of his sign, his habits, and himself.

Jake regarded the disorganized Job with a cold, fishy, and distrustful eye, while with a habitual gesture he wiped the tobacco-stained corners of his mouth with his finger-tips.

It was not worth while to tell this obstreperous client that he had pinned the notice to his door because he wanted to sleep, and that he had wakened not fifteen minutes before. Waiting until Job had “run down,” he asked suavely what he could do for him.

“Guess ye ’ve heard ’bout my bonds, hain’t ye?” said Job. “Well, I want ye to get Rufe Holt ’rested. He took ’em. Don’t care a mite what it costs — not



TOLD HIM WHAT HE THOUGHT OF HIS SIGN, HIS HABITS, AND HIMSELF

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a mite, so ye do the work and do it quick."

Jake's one eye glittered at the mention of the bonds. If he was surprised that this simpleton had not applied to the usual officials, he gave no sign: a fee was a fee. "What's your case?" he asked.

"You've come to the right person, Mr. Bixby," he said, when Job concluded his recital of the facts. "I've seen better cases, of course, but I'll make Barton arrest that boy just the same. Sam can't play any tricks on me. I'll drive up with him in the morning and see that he does his duty. You go right up to your place and leave it to me."

On this, Job departed. His face was jubilant as he came down the steps, and climbed once more into his wagon. On a distant corner he saw Tucker, Paige, and Sam, regarding him. He went out

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of his way to drive by them, his blue eyes twinkling with triumph, his straight mouth curved in a demure grin.

Sam had been giving the two lawyers an account of his journey to the farm, to which they had listened with appreciative interest. Together they had come to a pretty close guess as to the meaning of Job's proceedings.

"I'm sorry for the old codger if Jake gets his gaff into him," said Sam. "I swanny he's comin' this way. Just look at him—smiling as a basket of chips. Guess he thinks he's got ahead of us all this time. You wait; I'll take him down a peg. I'll give him Hannah's message."

And Sam stepped out into the street.

Job, a glint in his eyes, stopped his horse. Sam, putting one foot on the hub, leaned towards him confidentially. "Say, Job," he drawled with treacherous soft-

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ness, "I got something to tell you. Hannah's heard how you want Rufe arrested. She's goin' to see to 't that he's bailed out. She's goin' to hire him to do her chores. She says Rufe 'll feel kind of discouraged. She wants him to know she don't believe he did it, and that there's a good home waitin' for him. Guess you don't mind tellin' him, do you?"

"Not a mite, not a mite," was Job's unexpected and hearty reply. "That's real clever of her, ain't it?"

And with a twinkle in his eyes for Sam's discomfiture, he clucked to his horse to go on.

Meanwhile where were the bonds — the Hannibal and St. Jo Railroad eight per cent coupon bonds, worth ten thousand dollars? Were they still in the bushes by the brook? They were not.

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“Oh, get out! Old Bixby hain’t got any bonds!” was what the skeptical young Marvin had said when Rufe told him the news. Nevertheless, he was shaken. “Bonds,” he muttered to himself as he went off down the road, “him!” He’d go down to the brook and unroll that bundle of Sunday shirts: he guessed *that* would prove it. He was n’t going to run to see, either. *Pluff, pluff, pluff* went his deliberate bare feet in the dust of the road: he guessed he’d take his time. He thrust his big straw hat back from his forehead; he stuck his hands in his pockets; he began to whistle. He was n’t afraid, “Shucks, no!”

He passed the knoll from which he and Bert had watched Job’s preparations, and now he could see across the sloping pasture the line of alder-bushes that marked the course of the brook. Four cows were

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visible: one stood in the water where it flowed over some pebbly shallows; two were leisurely cropping the grass on the bank; the hindquarters of another were disappearing in the bushes.

Willard remembered suddenly that Bert had thrown the clothes into a place criss-crossed with cow-paths, where the cattle gathered in the heat of the day; probably the rest of his father's herd was there. He quickened his pace. The vision of Job's shirts — perhaps Job's bonds! — torn, and trampled in the mud, stripped him of his pretended nonchalance.

Vaulting the fence, he raced across the close-cropped sward and burst into the bushes upon the astonished cows. Most of them were lying down: these began clumsily to get upon their feet; and one white-faced heifer, standing in the path, looked at him with a stupid, startled

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face: pendant from her mouth was a shirt, the starchy taste of which had tempted her.

“Drop it!” shrieked Willard, diving forward. He wrenched away all but the cuff, while the heifer, with a snort of terror, turned with uplifted tail and fled!

Willard, the rescued shirt drooping limply from his paralyzed hand, looked hungrily about. Not so much as another rag could he see. “There weren’t any bonds,” he cried aloud sharply, sobs of terror in his voice. “There’s just *got* not to be any bonds!”

But at supper that night, his father told the tale of Job’s misadventures. The boy could no longer make his desperate pretence of doubt. He ate nothing. When he and his father went out to milk, he gazed with sombre, outraged eyes

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upon the round flanks of the placid, indifferent cattle.

. He had n't any receipt for getting bonds out of cows.

V

BERT TAYLOR'S home was in New York City, but his father, who was Ellmington-born, had sent him to spend the summer with his aunt, Mrs. Jim Spencer. Jim Spencer was good-humored and well-to-do. Mrs. Jim was a capable, pleasant woman, who ruled her husband and her household, and presently her nephew, with a firm yet easy hand.

Now Esek Marvin was Mrs. Spencer's milk-man, and Willard sometimes came in his blue overalls to deliver the milk. The first time that the lads met, Bert was inclined to regard the country boy as inferior, and began to talk airily of the wonders of the great city. But Willard refused to listen.

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"I bet they hain't got any woodchucks there," he struck in boldly.

This consideration halted Bert in mid-career: he stared helplessly at Willard, quite unable to contradict him.

"You'd just ought to see the one I chased into the wall the other day," pursued Willard. "He was a sockdologer. I got father's gun and shot him."

He stopped to let the whole glory of this achievement appear, while he allowed his eyes to wander contemptuously over Bert's trig city suit; then by way of clenching matters he added pityingly, "Guess you don't go shooting much in New York, do you?"

"No," said Bert, trying to make the admission sound like a boast. "They would n't let you fire guns in a city."

"Huh!" was Willard's comment, and it seemed so to "place" New York that

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Bert suddenly grew ashamed of his home.

This was always the way: no matter what he described, what he wore or owned, what he thought or planned, Willard could match it with something much better of his own. As Bert was one of those boys for whom the value of anything lies in the respect it excites in others, he was within a week emulating Willard in all ways. He began to think that his knickerbockers were "sissy"; that his shoes proved him a weakling; that his straw hat was "dudish." But when he asked leave to discard his finery, Mrs. Spencer merely laughed.

"Willard Marvin's all well enough," she said, "but I don't want any weak imitations of him round. You let him be himself, and you be yourself."



GUESS YOU DON'T GO SHOOTING MUCH IN NEW YORK, DO YOU?

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Thus, in respect to dress, Bert had to remain inferior to his model, a fact which, with his ignorance of woodchucks, foxes, trout, horses, cows, woods, brooks, guns, and fishing-rods, kept him humble. He let himself be patronized and bullied by Willard to the point of outrage.

Mrs. Spencer looked on, amused and tolerant. "You'll get tired some day of playing 'follow my leader,'" she predicted.

Bert could not see what she had against his hero.

"I have n't anything," she said. "I've got something against you. I want you to be something more than anybody's shadow, that's all."

Bert of his own accord would never have changed Job's wedding outfit for rags from a scarecrow. Swept on, how-

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ever, by Willard's force and assurance, he had carried out his leader's brilliant inspiration with chuckling delight. But as the day wore on and the first keen edge of the joke wore off, the ugly vision of himself bending over the bag while Willard stood guard upon the knoll grew vivid, disturbing, and persistent. It looked much like theft. At length he timidly asked when they were going to take the clothes back.

Willard stared. "Take 'em back!" he exclaimed, "what d'ye want to take 'em back for!"

And Bert looked away, ashamed.

He grew silent and dull. Too afraid of being laughed at to say anything more, he began to wonder how he could return the clothes without Willard's knowledge. "I guess I'll go home," he muttered, his eyes on a distant hill.

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Willard studied him for a moment: then smiled scornfully. "Huh!" he said, "I know what's the matter with you. You're scared of old Bixby."

"No, I ain't," retorted Bert, coloring. "I—I guess I'm going to be sick. I—I'm going home anyway."

"Go along then,—who cares! 'Fore I'd get scared and cry baby like that!" And Willard turned contemptuously away.

Hurt and indignant, Bert plodded along the dusty Ellmington road. He drew what consolation he could from his own moral sensitiveness.

"Playing a joke's all right, but I ain't a thief," he exclaimed to himself righteously. "Hiding things just for fun's all right, but to keep 'em hid—that's stealing. Guess I'm going to do what I think right spite of old Marvin. He ain't

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my boss! I'm going to get those things and put 'em back,—and I won't tell him either. I guess if Mr. Bixby finds 'em all right, he won't do anything about it! And then I guess Marvin'll be glad!"

As soon as he felt sure that Willard could not see him, he sneaked into the pasture and circled back to the alders among which Job's finery was hidden. Gathering up the whole clumsy mass, he found that he must tuck it all under one arm, while with the other he warded off the bushes as with bent head he pushed his way up the brook. He could not step out into the open, for there Willard might see him.

In the circumstances it is not surprising that a shirt caught on a limb, peeled off and fell to the ground for the Marvin cows to find.

Hot and panting, Bert worked his way

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up a sheltering ravine until he came to the patch of woods above Job's sugar-orchard. He planned to wait his chance, slip down unobserved to the house, toss in the bundle, and then "cut" for home.

In the woods he found a path, started to run, tripped over an exposed root and went sprawling. As he threw out his hands, his bundle shot forward, struck some undergrowth, shed its last enveloping shirt, and scattered on the ground. Scrambling to his feet, Bert began to pick up the fallen articles—a pair of knit blue woolen socks, a bandanna handkerchief, the flowered silk waistcoat. Then suddenly he stopped uncertain, dazed. For, as he lifted the waistcoat, it unrolled and dropped certain crisp sheets of half unfolded paper, covered with much dark green engraving—like bills!

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He spread out one. Attached to the main sheet were dozens of little squares, and on each one against a background of fine print was a great \$40. Then on the main sheet he saw in big, swimming, leering, disconcerting letters, "O N E T H O U S A N D D O L L A R S."

He tried to read the engraved script, but it blurred and shimmered: he could catch only the rich word, "Bond." How many were there? Ten. Ten thousand dollars,—increased by the sum of all the squares marked \$40! And he had stolen it! Kneeling there in the midst of the whirling trees, the bonds in his stupid hands, he turned white, sick, dizzy.

"Oh," he breathed, "oh, oh!"

Feverishly he gathered clothes and bonds together into a rough bundle, and stood irresolute. In his terror and con-

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fusion, he could not think: he acted blindly on the idea already in his mind — the plan, that is, to slip his burden, unseen, into Job's house. Shying at every moving leaf, he left the woods, crossed a strip of pasture, entered Job's sugar-grove, and with a gasp stopped short. There stood a man by the sugar-house! No — after all, it was only a blackened stump.

He slipped from maple to maple to the edge of the grove, stopped, looked, listened — then dove into a thick clump of young growth and lay panting like a frightened rabbit. It was long before he could bring himself to crawl forward, part the leaves, and look. It was now fully half-past one, and Job was driving into the yard with Sam, the constable.

“He's got a policeman!” Bert drew

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back, whimpering, and lay close to the ground, the bundle held tight under him. He did not dare move for a long while. When he looked again, he could see no one. The house had a stillness that was sinister and threatening like the quiet of a trap. The constable, huge and massive, Job, his angry eyes glaring beneath his hairy brows, were hiding: should he venture now, they'd jump at him!

Then the swift movement of Calvin's head, as, leaping from sleep into action, he bit viciously at the roots of his tail, caught Bert's eye. Even were the men not there, he could not face the dog! What had Willard said? "Chaw you up like a chicken; smell you out like a bloodhound." What if Calvin, with his keen scent for sinners, happened upon his trail!

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If Bert dared not go to the house, he dared not depart from it either. Suppose some one met him leaving Job's house with the bonds upon him? Yet he could not leave the bonds behind: men might find them, rain might make pulp of them, squirrels might nest in them, field-mice might nibble them. His terrors pinned him to the spot. He stayed—mocked by the gay June day, the serene meadows, the twinkling, mirthful river. In his blurred eyes, the landscape danced—the grassy spaces were green bonds, the jiggering leaves were green coupons!

“I *hate* green,” he muttered.

Calvin dozed; a catbird whined in the bushes; a woodchuck whistled in a tumbled wall; crows in the tree-tops scolded or conversed; the shadows lengthened.

Late in the afternoon, Bert's gloomy

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eyes quickened to attention. Rufe appeared from the meadow cornfield with a hoe over his shoulder. Swinging wide the great door of the barn, he got a measure of corn and fed the hens — a mass of white and red and bronze, crowding and bobbing about his feet. Calvin, sauntering to the barn, sat upon his haunches and looked on gravely. Then Rufe started for the pasture. His “co’-boss, co’-boss, co’-boss!” echoed melodiously against the hills. To reach the bars, he must pass within a hundred feet. Bert dared not breathe.

Nothing happened. Rufe dropped the bars; three self-satisfied cows came mincing down the steep and narrow cow-path and drank solemnly from the big tub over which crooked a battered finger of lead pipe; one raised a dripping mouth and lowed. The “likely” calf began

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“blatting” in the barn. Rufe brought two big tin pails and began to milk. Suddenly Bert heard the clatter of hubs in iron guards, and, in deep discouragement, saw Job stop in front of the barn.

Job, having, as he imagined, fought his way to victory through the ranks of all official Ellmington, felt proud of himself. Moreover, while driving home, he had hit upon a ruse for “gettin’ round Hannah” that had kept him chuckling and slapping his knee for a good half-mile. Altogether nothing — except a good supper — could possibly have added to his satisfaction with the world.

“Whoa!” he called.

At the unexpected voice, Rufe jumped from his milking-stool and faced about. As he stood waiting at the flank of the cow for whatever violence of words might

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come, the hurt, reproachful look on his freckled, homely face struck Job and completely dashed his spirits.

He had not thought so much about Rufe as about having his way, and now, disarmed by a victory that had left no opposition to excite his contrariness, he was conscious of great benevolence of feeling toward his chore boy. After all, the hiding of the bonds had been an act of misplaced affection, — an attempt to prevent a marriage which the “poor little critter” thought was going to separate them. He felt that he must set himself right with the boy, but was much embarrassed — not without warrant of circumstances — to find a way of doing so.

“Help onhitch, will ye?” he said gruffly.

One on either side of the tired white horse, they busied themselves with straps

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and buckles. Rufe kept his eyes obstinately on his work; Job kept stealing anxious glances over the horse's back.

"Seems though he'd know I just *had* to get him 'rested," he thought. "Don't seem's if he ought to hold any grudge."

Presently Rufe guided the horse out of the thills, let him drink, and led him into the barn, while Job, having pushed the wagon into the carriage-shed, lumbered after him, apologetic and ill at ease.

"Ye fed that calf?" he asked.

"No," said Rufe, who had soberly resumed his milking.

"Well, now!" exclaimed Job heartily, glad to get a word out of the boy. "That's real good jedgmint, I call it! Guess ye saw 'twa'n't so easy. I'll 'tend to her first-off. Guess I'll kinder put on my over-hauls, though, hey? Cal'late I'd better, don't ye, hey?"

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And Job laughed boisterously towards Rufe's rigid back. But the boy made no response.

Job stared a moment, while the milk hissed into the pail, then turned and clattered out of the barn. "Drat the boy," he said to himself, "seems 's if he might kinder meet me half-way, seein' what I've done for him."

He soon came back, wearing his overalls and bearing a pail of skimmed milk. This time the famished calf gave him no trouble. When Job had emptied his pails, and Rufe had filled his, they started towards the house. In the kitchen yard, Rufe, who was ahead, put down his burden and turned.

"You goin' to 'rest me?" he asked explosively.

"Well now, well now," stammered Job, upset by the sudden question. Then

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he made the plunge. "Wall, yes, I be," he said with a gasp. "I wish't ye'd kinder study on 't a mite, Rufy, I wish 't ye would. Guess ye'll see I got to."

Rufe turned, took up the pails again, and marched on.

"You did n't want me to get married and quit farmin', now, did ye? Ye thought that was what it come to, now, did n't ye?" Job argued to the straight, accusing young back.

"Yes," said Rufe.

"Well now, there bein' no one else round to steal 'em, and you wantin' to stop the weddin' — guess ye see where it lands me, don't ye? If ye don't own up and tell me where ye hid 'em, I just got to go on prosecutin' on ye. Guess ye see that, don't ye? Cal'late I may's well tell ye, fair and square. Barton'll be up first thing come mornin'. If ye

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hain't told me by then, I guess he'll take ye. I wish 't ye'd think it over kinder careful, — I wish 't ye would, Rufy, now honest I do." Job's voice was pleading.

Rufe threw a swift, indignant look over his shoulder. For a second, he was minded to protest; but he knew his master. If he disputed Job, Job would be more set against him than ever. He plodded on silently, the hot tears rolling down his cheeks, and Job followed after, much distressed.

At the house, Rufe set the milk to rise while Job made a great clatter about the stove: he wanted Rufe to know that supper was preparing. But the boy paid no attention, and, his work done, started towards the kitchen door.

"I'm sharp set as a cross-tooth saw," Job said amiably. "You had anythin' to eat?"

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"No," said Rufe, and he turned his head to hide his tear-stained face. "You'd 'a' called it stealin' if I took anythin'."

"Didn't ye take any noonin'?"

"No."

"Where ye goin'?"

"Guess ye don't want a thief sleepin' in your house," said Rufe bitterly.

"By the jumpin' Jehoshaphat!" roared Job. "You stop right where ye be! You're goin' to have supper same's usual, and ye ain't goin' to sleep out neither. Guess I can 'rest ye without abusin' of ye, you young galoot!"

Mrs. "Tip" Willard once said of Job's voice, "When Job Bixby starts in to make a remark—well, them as ain't used to it, jumps!" That being so, Bert, of course, heard Job's talk of an arrest, and it did not add to his pleasure on this

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soft June evening to learn that if he did not return the bonds Rufe would go to jail. Yet if he himself were caught, he would be the one to be imprisoned. But with Job and Rufe and Calvin all at home, how could he get the bonds to the house, unseen?

With gloomy eyes, he watched Job and Rufe enter the kitchen door. Presently smoke came from the chimney: hungry Bert knew they were getting supper. It was growing late. Long shadows stretched across the little valley; the distant hills grew purple and indistinct; robins called blithely in the trees; circling swifts dropped one after another into Job's parlor chimney. Bert began to worry about what his aunt would say if he did n't soon get home.

The slow hours passed. It grew dark and eerie in the woods; there were slight

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rustlings in the leaves; an owl hooted. Then the friendly light in the farmhouse went out. Bert felt more lonely, more frightened, now that it was gone. It seemed the very deep and middle of the night; actually it was a little after nine o'clock. Now, now was his chance to go down, now that the house was dark, now that Job and Rufe were sound asleep! But where was the savage Calvin?

Suddenly Bert stiffened and turned cold: his heart stopped beating and he gasped chokily. In the dusk, up loomed a black form — vague, exaggerated; it rustled towards him through the bushes. It was Calvin! On he came straight to Bert. The next moment — a rough tongue licked his cheek, a friendly tail thumped upon the ground.

Bert's heart fell back from his throat with a veritable thud. He put his arms

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about the hound's neck and wept upon his coat.

Calvin soon wandered away. Bert heard him circling through the sugar-grove and snuffing here and there with little anxious whines. Finally, the hound's long, melodious bay sounded through the woods, and he was off. He had picked up the trail of a fox. Again the clear, long-drawn cry sounded, and again. Bert listened to it for a long while, until it grew faint on the distant hills.

Then, cramped and sore, he rose and, gathering up his bundle, slipped from his nest, picked his way down the hill and tiptoed up to the ell: he hardly stepped once in a minute, he stopped so long to listen.

Cautiously, he felt his way around the dark house, until he came to an open window, — the window of Job's bed-

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room. He could hardly reach it, the ground fell away so there, but at last he slid the bundle over the sill. The clothes, much awry and loosened, fell behind Job's washstand placed against the window, caught and stopped short; then, from the end of the bundle, the bonds, with a slight sibilant sound against the wood, partly slipped.

A moment's breathless pause, then Bert turned and ran blindly away. A thin sickle of a moon hung in the sky and made the hills a silver shimmer of faint light among inky shadows — all was vague, uncertain, "pokerish." Bert faced the hill with a shiver of apprehension. He was a city boy unused to nocturnal nature: he thought of bears, catamounts — but not of more probable prowlers that he might meet!

But he dared not go home by the

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road. Some one might stop him and ask what he was doing out so late: even then there was a great rattle of wheels as a belated farmer drove by. He must go home across the hill.

About half-past ten, Mrs. Jim Spencer heard her nephew sobbing and fumbling at the front door, and lamp in hand went to the head of the stairs to light him to his room, and incidentally to put a few indignant questions.

But what she said was utterly different from what she meant to say.

"Bert," and her voice was at once suppliant and imperious, "don't you dare to come into this house one inch! Go right straight back; I'll talk to you out the window.

"Go out behind the barn," she continued from her new position, to the miserable boy in the moonlight below,

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“and take off every stitch you’ve got on —and bury them! Take the spade in the carriage-house. I’ll throw some other clothes out to you. And when you come in, you take a bath, do you hear?”

“Auntie,” Bert wailed up at her, “what was the matter with that cat, anyhow!”

VI

DELAYED by the affairs of her still disorganized household, Hannah reached the Spencers' next morning somewhat late. As she turned in at the driveway, she saw Mrs. Jim, an erect and decided figure, standing with Bert on the steps of the side door. Mrs. Jim was pulling her driving gloves over her firm, executive hands, and from her aspect Hannah concluded that somebody was going to be "set to rights" at once. Hannah noted also that Bert looked as if only his aunt's firm will held him up. She observed, finally, that John, the hired man, had an air of humorous enjoyment carefully repressed

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as he backed the roan horse into the phaeton. But she pretended not to notice.

"Good mornin', Mis' Spencer," she said; and, happy in finding an indifferent topic, she sniffed the air. "I do hope you ain't been losin' any chickens."

"No," said Mrs. Jim crisply, while John grinned and Bert dropped his eyes. "No, I have n't. I have n't lost anything but my patience. Bert, don't you try to sneak behind me now. This precious nephew of mine," and she pushed him mercilessly forward, "took Mr. Bixby's bonds and broke up your wedding."

"Him!" exclaimed Hannah; and her surprise was so eloquent of her opinion of poor Bert that he visibly winced.

"Yes," said Mrs. Jim. She rapidly told what she had been able to learn from her nephew, which, be it said, in-

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cluded no hint of Willard Marvin. "To cap it all, he threw the bonds into an open window and ran away like a little coward," she concluded, with a fervor highly disagreeable to Bert. "Goodness knows what may happen to them if they're not found right away!"

She intended next to offer the forced apologies of Bert, but had no chance. Hannah had listened with growing self-consciousness. Job had recovered his bonds! Job would be demanding a wedding! She was much put out to feel a red glow spreading over her face. She wanted desperately to escape.

"Mercy me, Mis' Spencer!" she exclaimed on the first chance, "guess I'm forgettin' you're payin' me for my time! I expect you've got the work all laid out same's usual in the settin'-room, ain't ye? Guess I'll step right in." And

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brushing rapidly by the surprised Mrs. Jim, she disappeared into the house.

Mrs. Jim comprehended and smiled; but her face set again as John led up the horse, and turned him so as to cramp the phaeton wheels.

"Now, you hop in," she said to Bert.

Lifting the front breadth of her skirt, she nimbly entered the carriage after him, and gathering up the reins was about to cluck to the horse, when Hannah put her head out of the window.

"You goin' up to Mr. Bixby's?" she said with a certain defiance.

"Yes."

"Thought I'd tell you there was some talk of 'restin' Rufe Holt. Guess ye can stop that, can't ye?"

"I'll stop it," said Mrs. Jim.

Hannah watched them drive from the yard. The smart, erect, dominant Mrs.

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Spencer set poor, huddled, shamefaced Bert in pathetic relief.

“ I s’pose he did n’t know there was anythin’ but clothes,” she reflected. “ Poor little tike ! ”

She found that there were sheets to be hemmed. She flirted one out, ran the edge through her fingers in search of a corner, and tucking it under the needle of the sewing-machine, gave the wheel a twirl and pedaled energetically.

“ Said all along ’t wa’n’t anythin’ but some fool joke,” she said to herself, as she guided the seam.

“ Pretty work at my age, — actin’ ’s if I warn’t more’n sixteen ! Mis’ Spencer must think I’m a born idjit.” And she made the machine hum till the thread snapped.

“ He ’ll pester the life out o’ me,” she muttered, while she repaired damages.

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"He ain't one to give up easy." She gave the wheel a twirl. "Thank goodness, I'm safe here and now!"

The machine hummed for a long while, evenly, steadily. Then she stopped pedaling, and gazed blankly at the wall-paper — it was pink ribbons and roses — for a full minute.

"I said I won't, and I *won't*," she said aloud, and set the machine humming its loudest.

Meanwhile, out at the farm, Job was suffering from a most unusual ailment — infirmity of purpose. He did not know whether he wanted Rufe arrested or not. For one thing, no one now was trying to prevent his handing the boy over to the law. Official Ellmington, with whom, as he imagined, he had fought so stout a fight, was subdued to his will: the

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hiring of Jake had settled that. "Guess I showed them fellers down to the village a leetle somethin'," he reflected.

The boy himself offered no opposition: he went soberly about his work with an air of hurt resignation. Apathetically he ate a little breakfast; apathetically he milked the cows and turned them out to pasture; apathetically he fed the hens, and stood by when Job fed the obstreperous calf. Every attitude and action meant that he gave himself relaxed and unprotesting into Job's hands to do with as he pleased, and this lack of resistance left poor Job comically helpless.

"I said I'd get them bonds first, and I'll get them; I said I was goin' to be married in that weskit they're wropped in, an' I *be*. But shucks!" he complained, feeling that fate wronged him in the

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gift of so limp an opponent, "shucks, ye might 's well try to wrastle with a piece o' red cotton string!"

Every now and then, moreover, the pathetic droop of the boy's shoulders and the listless drag of his step would flood the old soldier's heart with sudden embarrassing pity.

"Consarn it, I'd like to give him Hannah's word 'bout bailin' of him out. Would, too, if 't wa'n't for heartenin' of him up more'n 's fittin'. Guess he'd shut up tighter'n ever if he knew that."

It was at a moment when both pity and conscience were stirring uneasily that Job said to the boy: "Good land o' Goshen, Rufy, why in tunket don't ye own up? I don't want to 'rest ye! I don't noways want to be ha'sh with ye. All I want 's them bonds. Ye need n't be scairt to tell. There ain't anythin' bad

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goin' to happen to ye long's ye tell the truth."

Rufe, unable to confess, knowing that denial would not be believed, simply turned away in despairing silence. A moment Job waited: then angry and baffled roared out his wrath.

"Well, then, go to jail if ye want'er! Ye hain't got any more bend to ye than a six-year-old crowbar! If ye got to be sot, why can't ye be reason'ble 'bout it!"

He strode off, grumbling and gesticulating. "There ain't any tellin' where he hid them bonds nor that weskit neither. They're where they'll get rained on, likely's not, and I guess the colors ain't any too fast on either of 'em." He set himself down heavily on the kitchen stoop, whence he glared through his shaggy brows at the boy who was leading the white horse out to drink. "Consarn

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it," he lamented, "what's ailin' on me anyhow! Times, I feel like givin' him the horsewhip, an' times I feel like givin' him a stick of sugar candy. If there was anybody else, I'd say he had n't done it, just 's soon 's not."

This scene was repeated with variations all through the early morning hours, while that stern moralist, Calvin, looked on as if filled with disgust at the weakness of the unregenerate will before the carnal affections. Matters were no further advanced when, about eight o'clock, Jake and Sam in a livery-stable rig—hired for Job's account—drove into the yard. Job, who was in the kitchen at the moment, came to the door and regarded them with a sour, unwelcoming face.

Jake, with a curt nod, climbed over the off wheel, and, unbuckling the reins,

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began with his single hand cleverly to knot one of them through a ring set in the woodshed beside the door. Sam climbed out on Job's side and said good-morning with a quizzical smile; he was expecting some victorious jibe.

"Set up all night, did ye, so's to git an early start," growled Job. "Seems though ye was in an all-fired hurry to 'rest a leetle feller that never done nothin' to ye."

"You thought better of arresting Rufe?" exclaimed Sam hopefully.

"No, I ain't," said Job.

"Well!" said Sam, and pulled a grass-stem. "Job seems to be feeling kind o' prickly this morning," he reflected, and sat down on the edge of the porch.

He glanced about, and saw Rufe at work in the barn currying Job's old horse. The boy was looking at them, but

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dropped his eyes quickly on his work when he saw Sam regarding him. "Well," reflected Sam dolefully, "I guess if a feller's a constable, he's got to *be* one."

Meanwhile Jake, having made his hitch and tested it with a tug or so, came round the end of the buggy. "Where's the boy?" he asked.

"Down to the barn," said Job with an indicative jerk of the head.

"Better call him," said Jake.

"Rufe!" summoned Job. "Consarn it," he thought, "I just got to get them bonds."

As the boy, in response to the summons, dropped currycomb and brush and started towards them, Sam, stirring uneasily, turned his eyes on a hen dusting under the lilac-bushes, Job with very mixed feelings ran his fingers through his hair, while Jake fixed the boy with

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a cold and fishy eye. Rufe was so white that his freckles looked of enormous size : his eyes were wide with apprehension, but his mouth was set with resolution : he was not going to cry this time.

Job was struck with the steady courage of that slow approach. " I 've seen 'em look that way first time they was goin' under fire," he thought, the clutch of old memories at his throat. " Wish I did n't know he 'd done it."

Jake motioned Rufe to go ahead of him into the house, and the three men filed into the kitchen behind him. Sam leaned against the sink and chewed his grass-stem. Job fidgeted about, and finally, taking the tin dipper, got himself a drink. Jake sat down, and, noticing that Rufe had stopped by the door, ordered him with a gesture to step farther into the room.



YOU NEED N'T THINK I'M GOING TO RUN

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Angered by the mere look of the lawyer, Rufe, though he obeyed, broke out: "You need n't think I'm going to run!"

Jake grinned disagreeably; then, while he wiped the tobacco-stained corners of his mouth with the tips of his fingers, he studied the boy — a long moment. Then his eye wandered about the kitchen and through the open door into Job's bedroom. His glance rested there a long while, and became intent. Finally, he rose, and began pacing the floor. Whenever he neared the bedroom, he cast a sharp look into it.

Rufe was visibly suffering from this suspense, which seemed maliciously planned by the lawyer to torment him. Job grew uneasy and impatient.

"Well now, Rufe," said he, "guess ye see time's 'bout up. I guess mebbe you're ready to talk, ain't ye?"

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"No, I ain't," said Rufe.

"Ye hain't!" roared Job. "Then I'm done with ye! Sam, you take him!"

Rufe faced about desperately. "What's the use of me sayin' anything?" he cried in shrill despair. "If I say I did n't take 'em you won't believe it. And if I say I did take 'em, you'll want to know where they be, and I can't tell ye."

Job jumped. "You gone and lost them bonds?" he thundered.

"You be careful, young man," interposed Jake, a note of triumph in his voice. "I warn you that anything you may say will be used against you at the trial."

Rufe flashed him a scornful look; then faced Job again. "No, I hain't lost 'em!" he shouted in his excitement. "I hain't ever had 'em *to* lose! I hain't seen 'em since you put 'em in your old carpet-bag!"

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"How is it, then," said Jake smoothly, "that you happened to put them back of Mr. Bixby's washstand?"

"I did n't!" said Rufe, turning upon him.

Jake slipped into Job's bedroom; Job, in high excitement, followed him; and Sam, leaning against the sink, half turned and craned his neck to see. Reaching down, Jake drew out the bonds from behind the washstand.

"Them's the fellers!" cried Job. "I can see the Hannibal . . ."

But the lawyer, pulling the washstand forward, now bent down and gathered up Job's shirt, a pair of socks, a neckcloth, a bandanna handkerchief, and the flowered-silk waistcoat.

"I said I'd get 'em, I said I'd get 'em!" Job shouted, as he danced along beside Jake, who brought the things

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forward, and laid them on the kitchen table.

"Now what you got to say, young man?" he inquired sharply of Rufe.

The boy stared at the things in open-mouthed wonder; Job, coming forward, fingered the bonds, then took up the waistcoat and dusted it carefully; then stared at Rufe. The boy's tragic face dashed his spirits. He had got "them bonds," he had got that "weskit," but he realized that he was not happy. "I don't see how you could 'a' done it," he said to the boy.

"Well," said the satisfied lawyer to the puzzled and reluctant Sam, "I guess we may's well start along with the prisoner."

The word struck coldly upon all his listeners.

They were all so absorbed that none of them had noticed any sound of wheels,

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and all looked up in surprise when a sharp, decided, imperative knock came at the kitchen door.

"Come in, can't ye," roared Job, annoyed at this ceremony. "'Tain't locked nor anythin'."

Then the door opened, and Mrs. Jim Spencer, with her hand upon Bert's shoulder, pushing him before her, entered the room. Her eyes fell at once on the bonds spread out upon the kitchen table.

"Thank goodness!" she exclaimed; while Bert, casting a startled glance round the room and recognizing the constable, the lawyer, and Job, turned very white.

Mrs. Spencer gave her nephew a little shove forward. "You tell them all about it now," she said, "and don't leave out anything. Mr. Bixby," she added, "without quite intending it my nephew has

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done you a serious injury. He's come now to confess and beg your pardon, and take any punishment you may see fit to give him."

The three men looked from Bert to his aunt in astonishment. What had this frightened, harmless-looking boy been doing? They all knew Bert as an inoffensive lad, supposed to be not in the best of health. Not one of them connected this city visitor to Ellmington with the loss of Job's bonds.

"Mis' Spencer," said Job with dignity, "we're engaged in kinder ser'us business. Your nevvvy ain't done nothin' to me, fur's I know. If you could kinder wait a while I'd thank ye."

"If your business is arresting Rufe Holt there for taking your bonds, I think that Bert had better speak right now," said Mrs. Jim crisply.

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"Huh!" grunted Job, and glared at her.

"I did n't know about the bonds," began Bert in a tone hardly audible. "I would n't have touched the things if I'd known there were bonds in them."

"Speak up, can't ye?" thundered Job as he turned on him.

"I — I d-did n't know about the bonds," stammered Bert. "I'm — I'm sorry, Mr. Bixby, sir."

"What's that?" roared Job again.

"Tell your story from the beginning," said Mrs. Jim; "what were you doing up here?"

Little by little they got the story in all its details — all that is, but this: Bert breathed no word of Willard Marvin.

"Guess you're some proud of yourself, ain't ye?" said Job, when the boy had finished.

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But Job was not proud of himself: he had been utterly wrong about Rufe from the beginning, as circumstances were compelling him to admit, and there was nothing that Job did with less grace than own himself in the wrong. His mind went back to that first taunt of the elder Marvin which had set him to suspecting Rufe.

"Consarn Esek Marvin, anyhow," he thought. "Never was right 'bout anythin', nohow. Mean-spirited, suspicious critter."

His eye went uncertainly to his chore-boy: he owed him some apology. "Rufe," he said, "guess ye left that hoss standin' 'bout long enough, ain't ye? Guess ye better go finish curryin' on him up."

"Yes, sir," said Rufe, his voice exultant, for he knew that he was forgiven.

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He started with alacrity towards the door.

“Mis’ Spencer,” Job went on, with unexpected mildness, “that boy’s your nevvv. I guess you better deal with him — ”

But here his attention was distracted by the singular actions of Rufe and Sam. The constable some time since had shifted his position from the sink to a point whence he could get a better view out of the window. As Rufe went by him, he clutched the boy by the arm.

“You go out kind of soft the shed way,” he whispered, and the wondering Rufe obeyed.

The next moment Sam, with wonderful quickness for a man of his bulk, shot out of the kitchen door, and presently appeared with one hand twisted in the collar of a struggling mass of sprawling

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legs, writhing arms, and tousled hair, which on close inspection turned out to be Willard Marvin.

"You let me be, now, Sam Barton," he shrieked; "you let me be!"

"I guess we got the mainspring of the machinery right here," said Sam, and thumped the squirming Willard down upon a hard kitchen chair. "Now you set there and let's look at you."

Willard glared wildly round the room, much like a young wildcat in a corner. Set by his mother that morning to weed the vegetable garden at the side of the house, he had seen first Jake and Sam drive by and turn in at Job's, and then Mrs. Spencer and Bert. Bert had looked depressed and had refused to meet his eye. Was Bert going to "tell"?

Watching his chance, Willard had slipped from the garden and sought the

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knoll that overlooked Job's yard. But he had not been able there to find out what was happening, and so had slipped down behind the house, sneaked up to the shed, and crawled on hands and knees round to the porch. As he slipped over the wall, Sam had seen him, and had managed to keep him in sight most of the time since.

Sam liked boys: they interested him and he studied them. He knew of Bert's slavery to Willard; so when he saw Willard sneaking about he easily leaped to the conclusion that here was the real head and front of all offending.

"Mr. Bixby," whined Willard, as soon as he got his breath, "don't you believe what Bert told you! I did n't do a thing, honest; I just looked on!"

"You young whelp," cried Sam indignantly, "Bert ain't said anything about

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you one way or another! I guess that 's confession enough for you, ain't it, Job? Bert may have done it, but this Marvin boy put him up to it, that's sure!"

Mrs. Jim moved over to her nephew, and putting her hand on his shoulder patted it a little. She was touched by his loyal silence. Her affection was for the first time tinged with respect. "He'll turn out a Taylor yet," she thought.

Job glowered at Willard. He was so choked with the many things he wanted to say that he could say nothing at all.

"Esek Marvin put me up to it, Esek's boy done it; consarn the whole kit an' bilin' on 'em!" was the thought that kept repeating itself over and over in his outraged mind. "Get out o' here!" he finally exploded. "Get out! If I ever see ye round here ag'in, I'll take the horsewhip to ye!" And he advanced

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upon the cowering boy as if he were going to do him personal violence then and there.

But Jake Hibbard stepped forward, and laid a restraining hand upon his arm. "Easy, easy, Mr. Bixby," he said smoothly, "easy now. They'll get you for assault, if you lay hands on him now!"

"By the jumpin' Jehoshaphat!" roared Job, "I don't care —"

But the lawyer's insinuating voice broke in again. "Of course you don't, Mr. Bixby, of course, I understand that. But that is n't the way to get even with 'em." Jake's eye shone with eagerness, his hand trembled as he drew it nervously across his mouth. "I don't think you could do much prosecuting for theft, but I believe I could sue Esek for you and git damages. He's good for 'em, he's good for 'em."

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“Do ye?” said Job, the light of battle in his eye; “do ye? Do ye think ye could — honest?” and he slapped his knee. “Do ye!”

At this Calvin, who had been asleep under the sink, for some reason scrambled out with a great clatter of toenails, and, with an expression of deep gloom, made his way into the yard.

VII

Now that Job had recovered his bonds, there was no obstacle in the way of his marrying Hannah—except Hannah. The villagers thought this obstacle large, but they could not see any perturbation in Job: he was inactive, to be sure, but quite serene. He pottered about the farm as if interested in nothing else; he drove into Ellmington only on business, and, when there, made no attempt to see Hannah. Those who tried to chaff him, met with small success. With a demure smile just touching his lips, he would shoot a sly, confident, humorous glance at the questioner through his bushy eyebrows, and change the subject.

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“He’s up to some game,” said Mr. Paulding. “He had just that expression when I read old Eli Spicer’s will.”

Job got his ten “Hannibal and St. Jo Railroad eight per cent coupon bonds worth ten thousand dollars” from this Eli Spicer. Eli was his uncle, an antique fellow who had lived West, made money, and returned home to enjoy a few eccentric years before he died. Nothing in Ellmington had tickled him more than his nephew’s honest wrong-headedness.

“Job been cutting up any didoes?” he would ask with a toothless, anticipatory grin, whenever he went up street.

When, in the winter of 1873, old Eli died, he was found to have left his railroad bonds to Job expressly “to see what the ’tarnal fool would do with them.” He had insisted that this phrase

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be put into his will, and most people thought,—very likely old Eli himself thought,—that when Job heard it, he would be “contrary” enough to refuse the legacy. As a matter of fact, however, Job smiled the cunning smile of one who turns a joke against its maker, and placidly accepted the bonds. This was the smile that Mr. Paulding, who had been old Eli’s lawyer, remembered so vividly.

No one, of course, was more curious about Job’s plans than Hannah. Braced at first to meet attack, she became somewhat piqued as the days went by, because no attack was made. Perhaps it was for this that Job was waiting; perhaps it was for some such incident as finally occurred about ten days after the recovery of the bonds.

Early one morning, while Job was at

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the barn, Hannah drove by with Uncle Asa Simpson, a farmer who lived farther up the branch. Job watched them out of a stall-window as long as they remained in sight, and then, with visible satisfaction, sent Rufe to ask a few questions. The boy reported that Hannah was to be at the Simpsons' for three days, and that on the third day Simpson would drive her home in the evening as soon as the cows were milked. Job received the news with a chuckle, and the routine of the farm went on.

On the third day, however, there was a change. Job looked at his globular silver watch, saw that the hour was eleven, and abruptly told Rufe to "hitch up." Going himself to the house, he began to pack his carpet-bag. Into it he put his best black suit, his best black satin cravat, and his flowered-silk waist-

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coat. When the surprised Rufe drove the white horse to the house, he found him on the kitchen steps, solicitously brushing his beaver hat, with his carpet-bag and big cherry-wood cane beside him.

Without a word, Job put his hat on his head, his carpet-bag and cane on the grass-mat, climbed into the Concord wagon and gathered up the reins.

"Rufe," he said, "I cal'late I may be gone four, five days; kinder look after things, will ye? Guess that calf's 'bout weaned, so's she won't bother ye none! Dunno's there's anythin' special wants doin'. If there comes any rainy days, ye might give the old pung a cut o' blue paint. That's kinder restful work."

"You goin' to get married?" asked Rufe, much excited.

Job was non-committal. "That's as

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hereafter may be," he said. "You hold that houn' dog back," he added, pointing his whip-stock at the gloomy Calvin, who was sitting on his haunches with the air of one who knows the vanity of earthly joys. "That houn' dog ain't fit for nothin' but funerals."

Job started, but at the gate suddenly pulled up his horse. There was a distant jingle as of sleigh-bells. Job turned and beckoned.

"Here comes old Tucker in his hull-corn wagon," he called back to Rufe. "You better get ye some. It'll save a sight o' cookin'." Inserting his thumb and forefinger into his waistcoat pocket, he pulled out a roll of bills, from which he carefully peeled a twenty-five-cent scrip and handed it to his chore-boy.

"I know ye're fond on 't, Rufy," he said, with rather shame-faced kindness;

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he could n't apologize to the boy,—pride forbade,—but in his own mind he planned “to make it up to him.” Embarrassed and anxious to get quickly away, he added, “Guess I better hyper. Tucker’s a dretful tonguey feller, an’ I ain’t got any time to waste.”

The next minute, the clatter of the loose hubs of the Concord wagon was lost in the louder roar of wheels and hoofs on the brief wooden bridge over the brook, and Job disappeared round the bend in the road. A happy boy remained to “dicker” and “visit” with the “tonguey” hulled-corn man. From a dozen unwonted kindnesses, Rufe knew that Job was doing his best to win a pardon, and that, whether his present errand was a wedding or not, he intended to keep his chore-boy.

Meanwhile Job drove on with a com-

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placent mind. Passing the Marvin place, he saw Willard, with a face black as a thunder-cloud, glaring at him from the vegetable garden. Esek, harsh of temper and heavy of hand, had not treated with any mistaken gentleness the son whose mischief was bringing down upon him a vexatious law-suit.

“Guess he trimmed him some — judgin’ from the looks of him,” Job said to himself. “Esek’s dretful fond o’ sayin,’ ‘Like father, like son’; guess he’s got some warrant for it.”

At the village Job attracted attention at once. The carpet-bag at his feet, the high beaver hat perched on his round, obstinate head, were signals to “all and sundry” that something unusual was forward. A further portent was his driving straight to the hotel, putting up his horse, and hiring a room.

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After a noon-day dinner, he appeared upon the main street. He seemed to have a great deal of business. Into shop after shop he plunged; man after man he hailed and buttonholed.

"Keep your mouth shut four, five hours, or is it too much of a strain on ye?" was his first remark in each case, and in each case he left behind him a man blank with amazement.

When these men went home at tea-time and told their wives what Job was doing, there was an outburst of astonishment, laughter, and indignation, of speculation and comment the like of which was never known in Ellmington. Had Hannah been at home some one would certainly have warned her.

A little before seven Job emerged from his room at the hotel attired in all his finery, and paid his bill at the desk.

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"I don't cal'late to be back," he said. "If I ain't, have the old hoss druv up to the farm to-morrow, will ye?"

Under the eye of the curious clerk, he left the hotel with the air of a man who knows exactly where he is going. His beaver hat, his black broadcloth coat with its high, rolling collar, the black satin cravat, the vast and brilliant flowers on his low-cut waistcoat, his well "tallered" boots, the big cherry-wood cane with which he tapped on the bricks, the bulging red carpet-bag which he carried in his hand, made him hold the eye like a drum-major. His red, obstinate face, with its pursed mouth and twinkling eyes, was self-satisfied beyond belief. He was immensely pleased with himself. People craned their necks out of the windows to watch him as he passed. An occasional marked limp, ap-

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propriate to a veteran "all shot to pieces to the war," showed that he knew that he was, as it were, upon parade.

He walked sturdily up River Street until he came in sight of High Street. Then he quickened his pace, for at that moment Uncle Asa Simpson in his buggy, with Miss Foster at his side, turned the corner. "I'll be the first one to Hannah's, sartain," Job said to himself with great satisfaction; "spile it all if she got hold of anythin'."

On High Street he met Uncle Asa returning alone. Asa, after he passed, leaned far out of his buggy and stared back at Job with all his eyes.

"What in tunket!" he said.

When Job reached Hannah's cottage, he marched to the front entrance, and in the most ceremonious fashion rang the bell. Hannah came to the door. As

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she took in the details of his costume, her eye brightened and her chin went up.

“Good evenin’, Mr. Bixby,” she said crisply. “You got business with me?”

“Well, yes,” admitted Job, “I got somethin’ I kinder wanted to talk over, — I thought I’d come set with ye a while.”

“I don’t know’s I got any objection,” said Hannah, “if it’s anythin’ important.”

Unabashed by this grudging welcome, Job stepped into the entry, put down his carpet-bag, and followed Hannah into the little sitting-room.

“Won’t ye set, Mr. Bixby?” she said, elaborately polite. And sitting down opposite him, she eyed him with smiling and ironic challenge.

Job, after laying his cane beside his

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chair, lifted a bandanna handkerchief from inside his hat, mopped his forehead with it, and dropped it back again. Then he put his hat carefully on the floor beside his cane.

"Terrible hot weather for the time o' year," he remarked.

"Seems real nice June weather to *me*," returned Hannah.

"Guess ye've heard, hain't ye?" said Job, apparently unconscious of her cool tone; "I got my bonds back."

"Yes, I heard it," said Hannah shortly.

"Wall," said Job, shooting a sharp glance at her through his thick eyebrows, "seein' I got 'em back, there don't appear to be any reason why we should n't get married right off."

"Job Bixby!" — And Hannah's chin went up so high that no one to look at

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it would have dreamed that it was double, — “ I warned ye fair and square that ye ’d got to marry me when we planned or not at all. I guess ye remember that, don’t ye? ”

“ Wall, yes,” drawled Job, “ I remember ye let drop somethin’ o’ the sort. But I don’t cal’late ye meant anythin’ by ’t.”

“ Well, I did mean something by it! ”

But Job paid no attention. “ Hayin’ ’ll be comin’ on pretty soon,” said he, “ an’ I got to be back to the farm ’fore that — I cal’late we ’d best have the weddin’ right off. We can get to Burlington for a day or so, just as we planned, if we get married right off. Come a fortni’t, I guess we could n’t. I cal’late to give ye a real good time.”

Hannah bit her lip. “ Got it all planned out, have ye? ” she said.

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"Well, yes," said Job, watching her. "It's mostly best to plan kinder careful. Fact is," he added, "I came down to marry ye to-night."

"You did!" exclaimed Hannah, sitting bolt upright in her astonishment.

"Yes," said Job, blandly. "I thought 't was best."

"You got the face to set there and tell me you're goin' to marry me to-night when I've said in so many words I won't have ye on no night!" cried Hannah, flushing. "Job Bixby, you gone clean crazy?"

"Wall no, I guess not," replied Job, placidly. "I guess what ye said wa'n't anythin' but temper — flare up like tow and all out next minute. I don't think a mite the wuss on ye for 't, Hannah. I like a woman to have some speret."

"I'm obliged to you," said Hannah,

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with concentrated irony. "But you can't take me up and set me down, Job Bixby, just *when* you want to, and *as* you want to. And I guess you better make up your mind to it."

"I sorter expected ye might feel some that way," said Job indulgently. "But I guess 't won't last when ye come to consider on't. 'Tain't sensible to cut off your nose to spite your face, I've always heard, and you're a real sensible woman, Hannah, when ye put your mind to't. Guess I may's well tell ye first as last I've made all the 'rangements for us to get married to-night."

"Made arrangements! What arrangements?" Hannah shot the words out like bullets.

"Well," said Job, with his slowest, most exasperating drawl, "I've done it real thorough. Ye'll be real pleased

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soon's ye get wonted to it. I've been down to the village most all day. I been steppin' round pretty lively, now I tell ye. I told 'em down to Tapley's to send up some eyesters—them scalloped ones, ye know. An' I told 'em to Perkins's to send up some ice-cream and cake, and coffee. Perkins, he belongs to the band, and he done real well by me. An' I got two tickets right in my wallet for the 'leven o'clock train to Burlington. I told the minister to be here at eight-thutty. I passed round word to all and sundry to kinder happen in 'long 'bout then—same's to a s'prise party. Miss Bates, she said she 'd slip in a leetle 'head o' time an' help dress ye. Mis' Farley an' Mis' Meader an' amongst 'em 'll lend a hand with the victuals, I guess. I sent 'em word by Farley. I ain't forgot anythin', now I tell ye. Guess ye might just

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as well step along and get that plum-color dress on that ye look so fine in. Don't seem's though there was any escape for ye, nohow!"

And Job, at the conclusion of his speech, put his hands on his knees and contemplated her with benevolent triumph.

As Hannah listened, her plump cheeks flushed and paled by turns with amazement and indignation. In a half-hour guests would be at her front door, shop-boys at the back door. What was she going to do? Send all those wedding guests away — again? She looked at the complacent Job, and then, suddenly, her good-humored mouth began to twitch. She gave way finally and laughed, and continued to laugh, her handkerchief at her mouth, until she fairly shook.

When her mirth had passed, however,

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she astonished Job by deliberately rising and leaving the room.

"Where ye goin', Hannah?" he cried.

"Say, Hannah, where ye goin'?"

Hannah caught the note of alarm in her lover's voice with much satisfaction, but she vouchsafed no answer. She fled to the kitchen, slamming the door behind her with so much decision that Job did not dare to follow; and sinking down into a chair, began to laugh again. Angry as she had been at first, she could not resist her sense of the humor of Job's stratagem or the wily completeness with which he had carried it out.

"Well, if he ain't the beatin'est old set thing I ever saw!" she thought, half vexed, half admiring. "I always said he'd be a real interestin' man to live with. I do believe he's got me. Don't seem's though I could send off all them

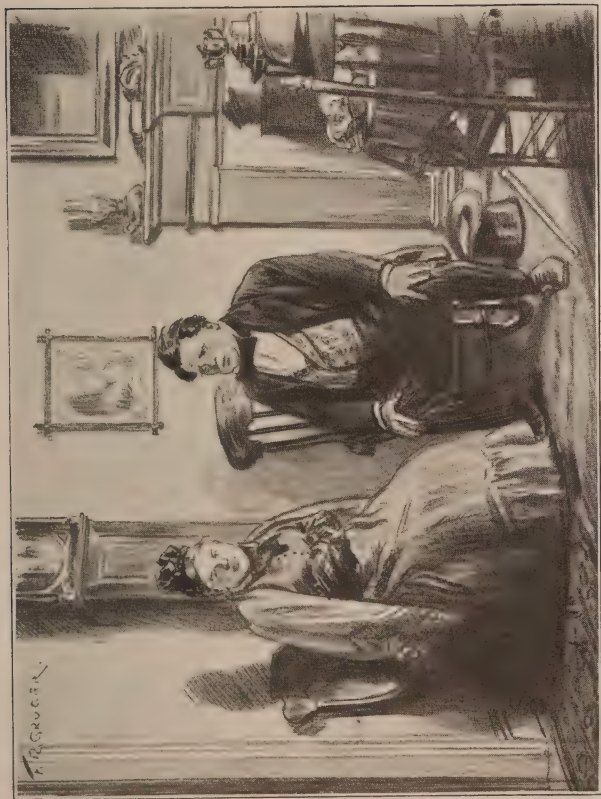
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folks again, nohow! I do believe he'd do most anythin' to have his own way. Well, I guess I can show him he'll have to do consid'able, this time! I don't know's I care if folks do cackle. Land knows they're goin' to cackle enough if I take him, or if I don't, and anyhow, they ain't any let-up *to* him. He'd do somethin' worse the next time!"

Upon this she rose and got her shawl and bonnet. These she put on, and then, returning to the uneasy Job, sat down with folded arms.

"When the first person steps in at the front door, out I go at the back," she announced with decision.

"Guess ye would n't do that, would ye, Hannah? I guess ye would n't," said Job anxiously. "I guess ye'd hate to disappoint 'em again, now would n't ye? It's goin' to be a mighty pooty wed-



FIRST PERSON STEPS IN AT THE FRONT DOOR, OUT I GO AT THE BACK

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din', if ye don't get contrary, and spile things. The band fellers, they said they'd all come in them new uniforms they've just bought 'em down to Boston. I cal'late they'll look pretty spruce. An' I guess mebbe they'll have torches. And the women folks is all comin', sartain, — Mis' Peaslee, Mis' Barton, Miss Ware — I sent 'em all word. I guess they'll all dress up consid'able. An' them 'scaloped eyesters, an' ice-cream, an' railroad tickets — they cost consid'able! Ye don't mean it, do ye, Hannah?"

"Job Bixby," said Hannah, "is that all you care about, — the folks bein' disappointed, and the victuals wasted and such? Would n't ye be disappointed any if ye did n't get me?"

"Why, why," said Job, startled, "why yes, of course, Hannah. I would — consid'able."

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“ Well,” said Hannah briskly, “ why did n’t ye say so ? ”

“ Why, I s’posed ye understood that. Course ye know I care for ye consid’able — quite a consid’able lot. What did ye think I was takin’ so much trouble for — hayin’ comin’ on an’ everythin’ ? ”

“ Now see here, Job,” said Hannah, as if coming to a sudden decision, “ I’m willin’ to test you on that. If you ’ll give over that un-Christian suit against Marvin, and put the bonds into my keepin’, so ’s you won’t spend ’em all on that old rocky farm o’ yourn, that’s ruined you once and will ruin you again soon’s somebody tells you you can’t raise oranges on the north side o’ the house, — why, I ’ll marry you, — now or any time ! ”

Job gasped. “ Ain’t ye kinder onreasonable, Hannah, now ain’t ye ? ” he exclaimed.

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“ No, I ain’t,” said Hannah. “ If you’d married me sensible when you’d oughter, I should n’t have said anythin’. When you’d lost your money I’d ’a’ worked for you, and not said a word. But after the way you’ve acted, I guess I got the right to make some conditions.”

“ I dunno’s I care so much ’bout them bonds,” said Job, “ but that suit against Marvin, now — ”

But Hannah jumped to her feet. “ You got to speak quick,” she exclaimed relentlessly, “ there’s some one comin’ up the front walk. When that front door opens, I ’m goin’ out the back ! ”

It may seem strange that Job should let himself be so dictated to and not grow “ contrary ” at once. But Hannah understood her queer lover perfectly. When his stubborn will got fixed upon any particular thing, he could see nothing else,

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and cared for nothing else, and would pay any price to get it, even unto the whole of his fortune. Just as he sank hundreds upon hundreds of dollars in his bog-hole merely to convince 'Bijah Keith that potatoes could be raised in that identical place, and never thought the money of the least consequence in comparison with victory over that irritating old man, so now all he cared for was to marry Hannah, as he had promised himself that he would, and for the moment he was willing to give up anything to have his will.

"Wall," he said, "we'll call it a bargain. I'll get Paulding to deed 'em over to ye fair and square."

"And that suit against Marvin?"

"I wish ye'd kinder ease up on me there, Hannah," pleaded Job. "It don't seem right to let Marvin get off scot-free" —

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"Scot-free!" cried Hannah. "Much Jake Hibbard'll do to him, if it comes to that! Jake's just busy bleedin' your pocket-book, and the suit won't be anything but a bigger bill of expense — to say nothing of being unneighborly."

"Wall," roared Job, "if ye want me to be trompled all over by Esek Marvin —"

But at this point the front door opened, and Miss Bates, all smiles and joyful excitement, stepped in. "I got word," she said, "you wanted me early so as to help dress you; my, but this is unexpected!"

"Well," said Hannah, "I'm real glad to see ye. I began to think ye would n't get here on time."

And leaving Job to ponder this remark, she started upstairs with her friend to dress for her wedding.

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“A man that’s sot,” she reflected, “ain’t such a bad thing in the house, if there’s some one sensible ’round to p’int him. Job’ll be real interestin’ to live with.”

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